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WHISTLER

By

THEODORE DURET

WHISTLER

By

THEODORE DURET

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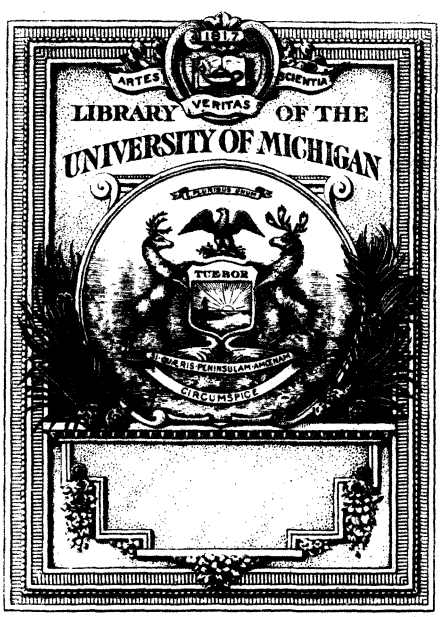


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# WHISTLER

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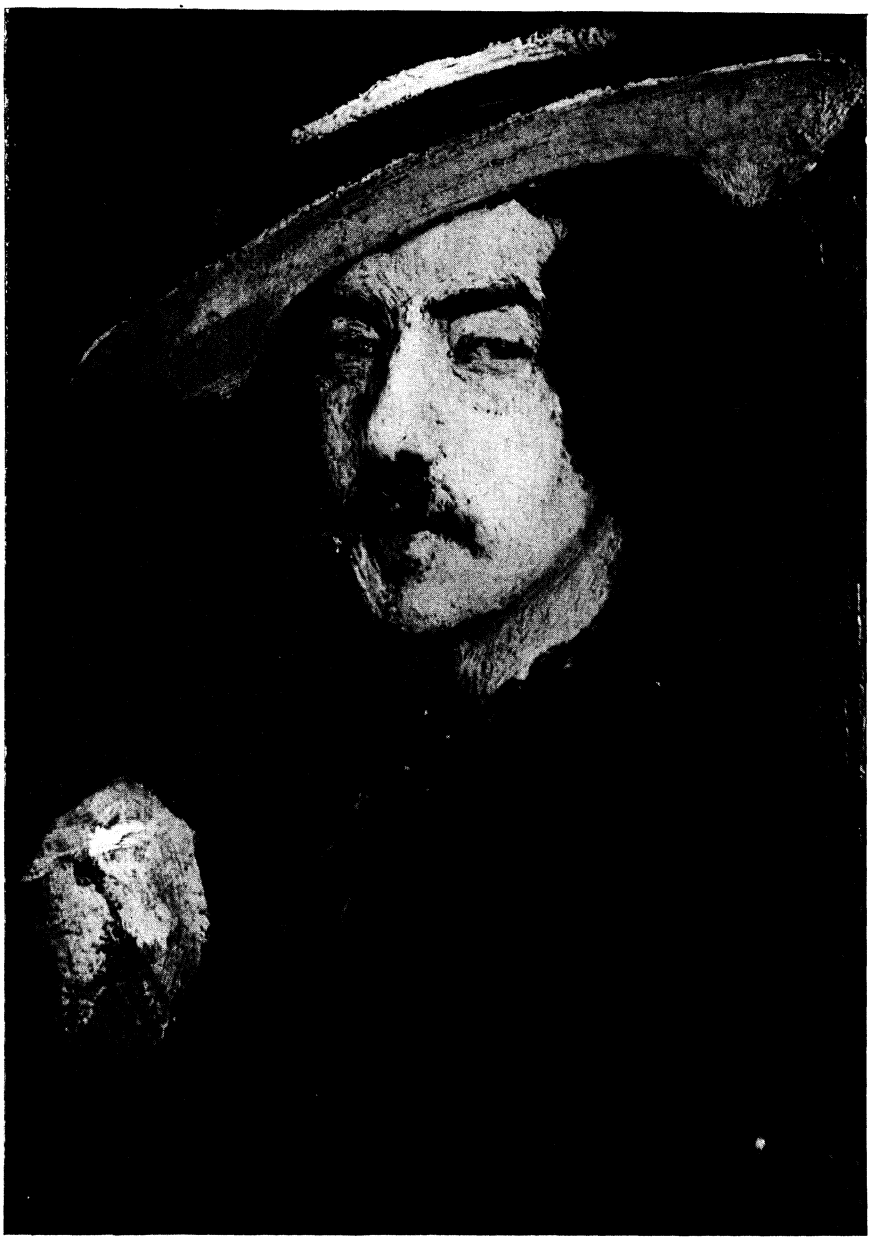

PORTRAIT OF WHISTLER BY HIMSELF (1859-1860)

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# WHISTLER

BY

THEODORE DURET

AUTHOR OF "MANET AND THE FRENCH IMPRESSIONISTS"

TRANSLATED BY

FRANK RUTTER, B.A.

WITH THIRTY-TWO REPRODUCTIONS IN BLACK AND WHITE

PHILADELPHIA

J. B. LIPPINCOTT COMPANY

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## THE TEST OF TIME

BENEATH the cupola of the National Gallery in London there runs the following inscription :—"THE WORKS OF THOSE WHO HAVE STOOD THE TEST OF AGES HAVE A CLAIM TO THAT RESPECT AND VENERATION TO WHICH NO MODERN CAN PRETEND." This is a fine phrase, full of truth. Time is the Great Master who finally decides the true place which artists and writers ought to take and keep.

One cannot foretell the work which time will accomplish, for if some men more far-seeing than the rest succeed in anticipating it, they have no means of opening the eyes of those around them in order to communicate to them their foreknowledge. But when time has passed and exercised its influence, we discover that its scythe has mown down reputations which contemporaries had believed to be unassailable, and that by way of compensation men, despised during their own lifetime, have been raised aloft and placed on pinnacles.

But what it is above all necessary to understand is that those who "have stood the test of ages" form definitely an élite, composed of men hailing from the most different countries and surroundings. These elect, once they are gathered together, seem like a large family whose members are markedly individual in countenance and whose characteristic features we believe to be very different, but nevertheless wear an aspect of relationship and appear to have been made to live together. To recognise this phenomenon we have only to visit a museum.

What is the element of superiority which, notwithstanding all differences, establishes the tie of relationship? It is the faculty



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possessed in common by all great artists, however they may vary in temperament and aptitudes, a faculty of seizing and rendering life. It is by this means that they create works truly powerful, destined to captivate generations yet to come. To create works which, as soon as we are before them, arrest us and hold us at sight, by their intrinsic force and independently of the thought and will of the spectator, this is the mark of an artist destined to leadership. And this faculty Whistler possessed in the highest degree.

His views of the Thames, his views of Venice place before our eyes, as it were, a section of the world. We can say, after having looked at them, that we know them better than we would have by contemplating the places directly. The Thames series give an intense sensation of the English environment, of the English atmosphere, of the London of a certain epoch. It is maritime England that they present, with its own character, different from what one could ever see anywhere else. With the Venice views we enter into that Italy which has borrowed from the East, illumined by the sun of the Adriatic. We find ourselves in the presence of a fallen greatness, but always penetrated by nobility and the patrician elegance of its period of domination.

The portraits of Whistler show us beings absolutely characterised and shown in their essence. I have related, further on in this book, how, placed unexpectedly in front of a man I had never before seen, I was able to discover who he was by the memory of a particularity I had remarked in his portrait painted by Whistler.

An incident of the same kind, still more significant, happened in regard to my own portrait. At a picture exhibition in Paris during 1914 I encountered a group of friends, whom I joined. Among them was a stranger who, without my name having been pronounced, began to look at me as if he knew me. It was Mr Pauli, then director of the Bremen Museum, now at Hamburg, who said to me afterwards: "As soon as you approached I immediately knew you through having seen your portrait by

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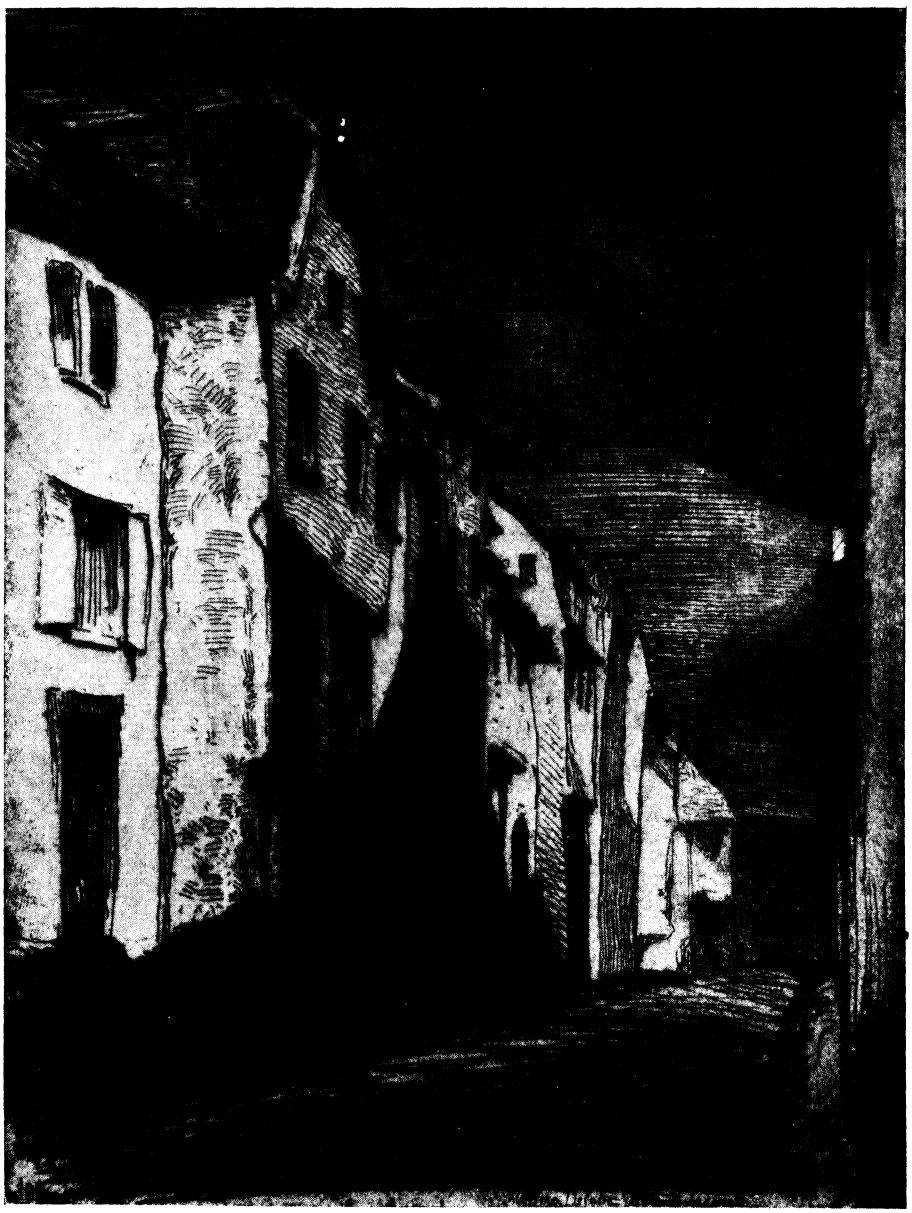

STREET IN SAVERNE

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Whistler shown at the Secession in Berlin." When Mr Pauli spoke thus more than thirty years had elapsed since the portrait had been painted in London, and ten years since it had been exhibited at Berlin. To recognise at first sight, under these conditions, the original of a portrait proves that the salient features have been absolutely disengaged. Only by this means can be obtained that kind of resemblance which is capable of surviving the changes brought about by the years.

Indeed, it is a simplification, an abstraction that has been realised in this portrait, and thereby it has maintained indefinitely its likeness. The artist, to create works likely to live, ought to be able to disengage the essential character from everything; among all the features which present themselves, he ought to discover the salient feature and accentuate it; he should know how to give a decisive place to the dominating part.

Now, no artist has known better than Whistler how to act in this way. He has everywhere and at all times known how to throw in relief the essential feature, while eliminating the details which would weaken it. One must know how to look at Nature and select among the elements she offers; there is no more to say. It is an axiom which artists who wish to leave immortal works should meditate on and appropriate.

It is thirteen years since Whistler died. When one considers now his works which have entered into the great collections and museums, we see that they have already ranged themselves with those which, according to the inscription at the National Gallery, "have stood the test of ages." We can no longer understand the indignation they excited at their first appearance. It is because Time, the Great Master, has already begun his work in favour of Whistler, because he has substituted for the first judgment of contemporaries the final judgment that he never fails to pronounce in favour of those who have had the supreme gift of creating works alive by their profundity and beautiful by their form.

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## CHAPTER I

## YEARS OF YOUTH

WHISTLER was born on 10th July 1834, at Lowell, in Massachusetts, and was baptized there, in the Church of St Anne, with the Christian names of James Abbott, on 9th November 1834. His father, George Washington Whistler, after completing his course of study at the military college of West Point, became an officer in the United States army and attained the rank of Major. After leaving the army Major Whistler adopted the profession of a railway engineer in the States. He acquired a considerable reputation in his profession, and when the Russian Government, desirous of constructing railways, resolved to call in the assistance of an American engineer, it fixed its choice on Major Whistler. So in 1842 he journeyed to Russia, with his family, and became the chief adviser for the first railway undertaken, that from Moscow to Petrograd. At his death; in 1849, his widow returned to America, bringing her children with her. A part of James Whistler's youth was thus spent in Petrograd.

Major Whistler was twice married. By his first wife he had three children: two sons, of whom the younger, an engineer, died in England in 1869; and a daughter, married to Mr Seymour Haden, a medical man since known as an etcher. By his second marriage; with Matilda McNeill of Wilmington, he had five sons, of whom the eldest, James Abbott, the subject of this book, was to survive all the others. Whistler during his youth used only his first name, James—" Jim " or " Jimmy " for his intimates—but later in life he adopted his mother's name, and, adding it to



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those he had been christened by, he definitely called himself James Abbott McNeill Whistler.

Following in his father's footsteps he entered, in 1851, the military college of West Point, there to make those studies which would eventually give him also the rank of officer in the United States army. But at the test quite another vocation than that of arms declared itself. He developed an extraordinary aptitude for drawing, and soon the handling of the pencil absorbed him and dominated all his other studies. He had begun drawing when he was quite a child, and there are at Petrograd drawings which he made when he was ten years old. The drawings made at West Point are already very free and very personal.

Governed by his artistic tastes, and being, as he was to be all his life, the very incarnation of independence, Whistler could not adapt himself to the rules of a military college. When he had been three years at West Point it was evident that he lacked the aptitudes requisite for the studies he pursued there, and that he could not bend himself to the severe and meticulous discipline that was imposed. He was informed of his dismissal, brought about by his want of discipline and his failure in chemistry. The examiner had asked him what he knew about silicon. Whistler had replied : " Silicon is a gas." At this the examiner put a stop to his questioning, and Whistler was able to say later : " If silicon had been a gas I might have become a general in the United States army." One must confess that if it is difficult to imagine Whistler, with his way of living, amenable to military obedience, he does not appear any better fitted for the study of chemistry. His artistic vocation and impulsive nature kept him outside all rules and forbade him a formal school.

At the end of 1854 he was taken on as a draughtsman in the Government Coast Survey Department at Washington, and there he seemed to occupy a position for which his faculties were well suited. But he was strangled, so to speak, in drawing maps, and the restrictions of topography appeared to him as insupportable

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FUMETTE

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as military discipline. Once he was told to engrave a plate showing a view, taken from the sea, of cliffs along the coast. He acquitted himself of the task extremely well, but afterwards, carried away by his fancy, he had added, of his own accord, at the top and in the corners of the plate, heads and groups of people, kinds of caricatures. With the introduction of these additions the plate could no longer be of any use for printing on the maps for which it was intended, and it became evident he was not made for the rigid toil of topography. He had then to quit the office at Washington as he had to quit the college of West Point.

His artistic vocation taking definitely the upper hand, he then left the United States, whither he was never to return, and, arriving in Paris towards the end of 1855, entered the studio of Gleyre.

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## CHAPTER II

## IN PARIS

WHISTLER in Paris possessed the great advantage of being able to speak and write French fluently, as a second mother's tongue. He had learnt it young at Petrograd and made use of it in Russia. He had contracted the habit, which he never lost, of sprinkling his conversation and English writings with French words. Thanks to his knowledge of the language, therefore, he was able to find himself perfectly at home in Parisian artistic circles.

He was certainly not what one could call a good student. He frequented the studio of Gleyre irregularly, little impelled to follow the direction of the master, from whom he differed profoundly, both in inclination and idea. As a souvenir of his stay with Gleyre it has only been related that at this time he and Tissot must have copied side by side the *Angelique* of Ingres.

The Parisian environment was to have a very great influence on Whistler. At the epoch when he arrived there the artists and students in the schools had developed certain customs which distinguished them—customs they have since lost, to become, in appearance at least, like everybody else. The pose they then affected induced them to lead a sort of life of "ragging"; they liked to make themselves noticed by wearing unorthodox clothes. Above all, they aspired to despise the common mortal, and the desire to astonish, mock and bewilder what they called "the bourgeois" was general among them. This special manner of living was to take possession of Whistler, finding a well-prepared soil in his manner as an artist. On the "gentleman," the man



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who had lived in the best circles of Russia and America and taken their stamp, there was thus grafted the habit of a separate pose, whimsical attire, a way of despising and setting at defiance the *vulgum pecus* (vulgar herd) incapable of seeing and feeling like an artist. This combination of the distinctive characteristics of a French art student and the manner of an American gentleman, in a man otherwise full of life, spirit and originality, was bound to make of him a quaint original who could not fail to be everywhere immediately remarked.

Arrived in Paris, then, Whistler, plunging hotfoot into the ways of artists, forming comradeships with many and intimate friendships with several, led a gay and careless life. He had read, in America, *La Vie de Bohême*, which had vividly struck his imagination. The heroes of Murger had shown him free and attractive manners, which he had promised himself to adopt on going to Paris. He behaved himself now as in Bohemia, but in reality he only gave an imitation, for the true Bohemian is poor and endures all kinds of privations, whereas he was in easy circumstances. His father had died, leaving a fortune. Whistler had left the management of his portion of the inheritance to his eldest half-brother, the engineer, who secured him an income of some two thousand francs (£80), and though led away by pleasures he often strained his resources and fell into money difficulties, he never knew real want as so many others have. All the time he was amusing himself, he worked. Indeed, whatever may have been the distractions, the quarrels, the lawsuits, the polemics which came into his life and took up a part of his time, he was never altogether distracted from his art; all his life was spent in work, and often he gave himself to it furiously for long periods.

As an artist in Paris he was divided between etching and painting. Etching, nevertheless, has been the first to leave productions susceptible to precise chronology, for his quite early works in painting are to-day difficult to find and classify. On the other hand, 1858 shows us a series of dated etchings. Among



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the number are found subjects taken in the course of a journey through Alsace-Lorraine, pushed as far as Cologne in Germany, and made in the company of Ernest Delannoy, a young artist who had become his intimate friend. They set off costumed in gaiters and great straw hats of unusual shape. Whistler represents himself thus in the etching which serves as a frontispiece to the series. Their journey, owing to shortness of funds, was finished on foot, and was full of incidents. I have heard it related at Oulevey's, a comrade of Whistler at this epoch, that in one town where they found themselves with empty purses the two companions had had a drum beaten to announce that two distinguished artists from Paris would draw portraits at three francs the bust, five francs a full length, and that the announcement had brought them sufficient amateurs to extract them from their embarrassment. *Si non è vero, è ben trovato.*

Whistler returned to Paris, added some plates previously engraved to those he had drawn during the tour, and, taking the collection to the printer Delatre, obtained a first series of twelve etchings, thirteen with the frontispiece, known as his *French Set*; limited to a small number of proofs, it was offered at the price of fifty francs (£2). The author was his own publisher, and looked after the sales himself. The additions made to the views in Alsace-Lorraine, *Liverdun*, *Rue à Saverne*, consisted of subjects taken from popular Parisian life, *La Vieille aux loques* (the old rag-woman), the *Marchande de Moutarde*, *La Cuisine*; the portraits of *Annie* and *Le Petit Arthur*, his niece and nephew, the Hadens, *Fumette*, a little dressmaker of the Latin Quarter, shown seated, whose head was also etched separately, and finally *La Mère Gérard*. This Mother Gerard came from the middle classes, was well educated and made verses. By repeated misfortunes, after having kept a reading-room, she was reduced to selling flowers outside the entrance to the Bal Bullier. Whistler, attracted by her picturesque appearance, wished to use her as a model, and the better to dispose of her he kept her for a long time by him,

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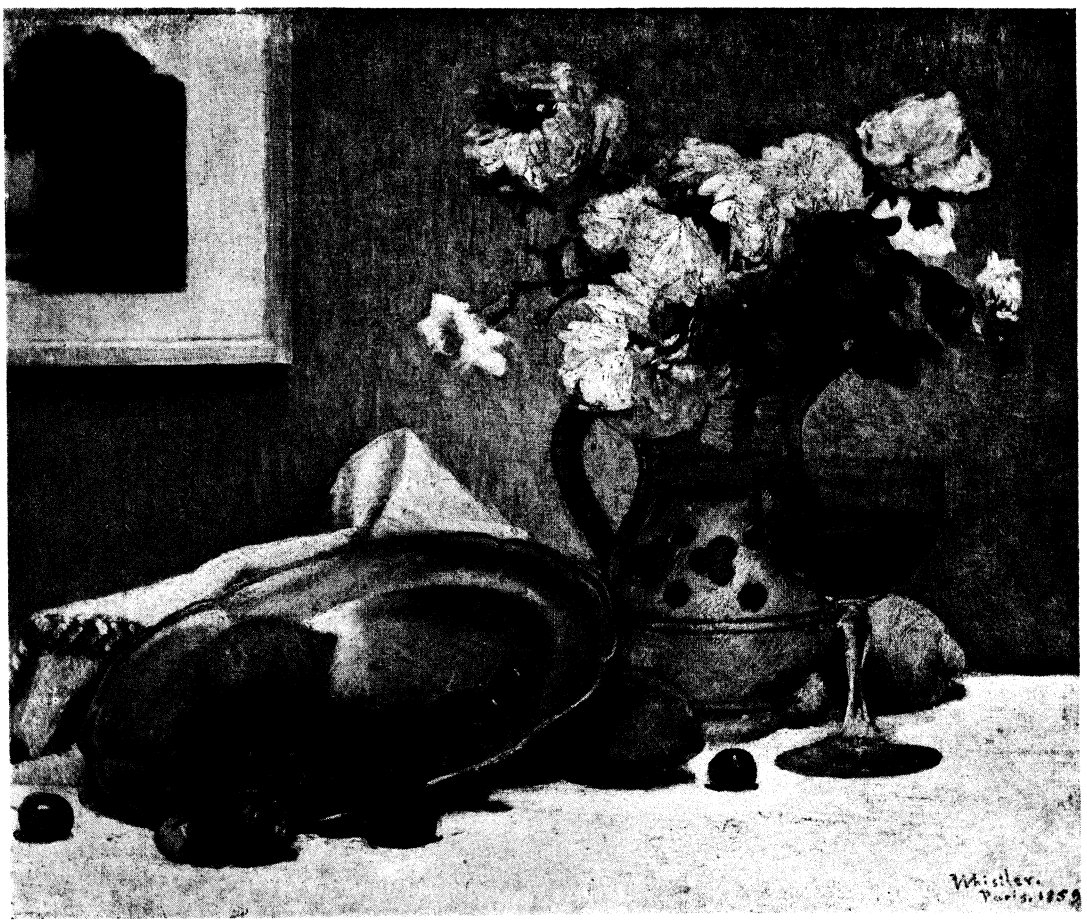


Still Life and Flowers

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promenading with her in town and taking her into the country, to the astonishment of spectators. In addition to the etching he also painted a head of her, which was exhibited at the Royal Academy in London in 1861.

He continued, after this, to make etchings in Paris: *Finette*, a creole of light character who danced at the Bal Bullier, *La Soupe à trois sous*, a low restaurant frequented by the very poor. One of his most esteemed subjects, *The Forge*, was done at Perros-Guirec in Brittany in the summer of 1861. The year 1859 saw the commencement of the subjects executed in London, *The Thames Set*. Then he attained the culminating point, as it were, of his art, by the perfection of the technique, the lightness and elasticity of his line and the vivacity of the whole. He was able to make later, renewing himself, works in a different style, perfect of their kind, but nevertheless not surpassing these productions of his debut. One of his finest Thames etchings, *Rotherhithe*, in which we see two sailors' heads in the foreground, and beyond, ships' masts and the waters of the river, is so perfect in craftsmanship that it suggests a work produced in calm and contemplation. Quite the contrary, Whistler graved his copper in a kind of warehouse that was being repaired. At one moment a brick falling from above, almost on top of him, caused him to turn abruptly, and the hand that was working, wandering, placed perpendicularly on the middle of the plate a long line visible in the engraving.

Whistler devoted himself to etching in the most diverse circumstances, tracing the image directly on the copper without any preparation or preliminary drawings. The copper-plate and the point were for him what paper and pen or pencil are for others. So his drawings are rare, while his engraved work is considerable. He made his point move with sureness; each line told and fell into its place. He could thus bring rapidly to conclusion any work he undertook. The portrait of the sculptor Drouet, a characteristic work of this period, was accomplished in two sittings, five hours' pose. He was really an engraver by birth

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and instinct. The true engraver ought, without concealing the nature of the instrument employed—on the contrary, even allowing us to perceive that it is a point of metal he is using—nevertheless, to get rid in his execution of that rigidity, those dry, hard and set lines which seem inseparable from the implement. It is for this reason that there are so few true engravers: because a man may know how to paint and draw without knowing how to engrave, because the qualities necessary to the making of an engraver are of a special kind. How numerous are the artists who, having only given passing attention to this branch of art, or lacking the requisite qualities, have only given indistinct works in etching. We do not perceive that they have handled a point. They have simply counterfeited pen or chalk drawings. They have not known how to engrave. Now, Whistler's etchings let us see immediately that they have come from a man without an equal in his art. They have decidedly the special character of works obtained by a rigid point, by a needle; yet we discover in them neither harshness nor stiffness; they are always supple and light.

Whistler had his studio in the Rue Campagne Première. Here he painted, among his earliest works (1857-1859), his bust portrait of himself, with a hat on his head, engraved by H. Guèrard. In this there has been discovered the influence of Rembrandt, in whom he was then deeply interested. He had been particularly taken by Rembrandt's head of a young man at the Louvre, with the wide biretta and the long wavy hair, and he amused himself by painting his own portrait in a similar get-up. Here is a heavily loaded canvas, a strong opposition of light and shade, while the wide-brimmed hat and tousled hair complete the analogy. A second portrait of himself, also of bust length, and with a hat on, which is reproduced as a frontispiece to this volume, but less Rembrandtesque and more marked by his own personality, must have been painted at about this period, only a little later.

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In 1859 he submitted for the first time to the Salon a picture, *At the Piano*. It was rejected by the jury. It represented the painter's half-sister, Mrs Seymour Haden, seated, playing the piano, against which her little daughter Annie, in white, stood leaning. The refusal of the jury prevented Whistler from showing it to the public, but it did not prevent it receiving the approbation of his comrades and painters of renown. Other beginners, Fantin-Latour, Legros, Ribot, were seen to be rejected from the Salon this year. Bonvin took all their paintings and showed them in his own studio. Courbet was one of those who saw them. He was particularly struck by the picture, *At the Piano*, which he highly praised. Whistler found his praise a great encouragement, and had henceforward with him continuous relations.

The picture shown in Bonvin's studio had drawn upon Whistler the attention of a whole group. From this moment his comrades, who had already recognised his talent as an etcher, knew that he was equally gifted as a painter. Young artists destined later to make their names, with whom Whistler in these early years contracted friendships, were Fantin-Latour, Legros, painters, and Drouet, the sculptor. His friendship with Fantin was the closest, and for years they lived their lives almost in common. In Paris Whistler would occasionally share Fantin's room, and then, when he had established himself in London, he made Fantin come over, and introduced him to his friends and people who might be useful.

The common life established during these years between Whistler and Fantin expressed itself in the interpenetration of their studies. The pleasure which one took in the other's productions is pushed to a point where each borrows from the other. Fantin always delighted in painting still-life and flowers, and although Whistler did not share this taste, we find him painting, in 1859, a still-life with flowers. This picture, while revealing the personality of its author, is both conceived and painted quite in the manner of a Fantin still-life.

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Among other souvenirs of their intimate friendship at this period there exists a drawing made under pleasant circumstances. One winter's day in 1859 Whistler, arriving at Fantin's, found him keeping himself warm by sitting up in bed with all his clothes on, strangely keeping his top hat on his head, and thus working away at a drawing. Whistler amused himself by sketching the scene on a piece of paper, which Fantin preserved. On his side Fantin, some years later, placed Whistler in the foreground of his great composition, *Hommage à Delacroix*, shown at the Salon of 1864,[1] where are grouped together the men who then represented originality and the future at Paris. Whistler is found there in company with Manet, Fantin, Legros, Bracquemond, Baudelaire and Champfleury. To the Salon of 1865 Fantin sent another group of artists, with the title *The Toast*, in which Whistler figured, wearing a Japanese robe. Fantin afterwards destroyed the picture, but before doing so he cut out the head of Whistler to keep it as a portrait. It afterwards passed into the possession of Mr Avery of New York.

From 1861 to 1865 the correspondence between Whistler and Fantin was very active. The letters of Whistler, written in fluent French, testify a keen friendship for Fantin. Whistler took the greatest interest in all that concerned him. He signals his efforts in London to make him known and find buyers for him. He keeps him informed of his own doings and goings; he gives him details about his own works that he is planning or executing, with sketches accompanying the text.

One learns from this correspondence that Whistler, in the summer of 1862, puts himself on the road for Madrid with the desire of seeing the work of Velasquez. He stopped at Guethary, between Biarritz and St Jean-de-Luz, seduced by the beauty of the place, and stayed there a good long time. He began several pictures, but rain and variations in the light stopped him from bringing any to a conclusion. His stay at Guethary brought him

[1] Now in the Collection Moreau in the Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris.

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FANTIN-LATOUR WORKING IN HIS BED

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nothing of any account, for he did not succeed in working there fruitfully. He had to return to Paris without going to Madrid, and he very nearly drowned himself while bathing. He gives Fantin a lively account of this accident:

"The sea here is terrible. I was carried away by a strong current which dragged me towards those breakers in question, and if it had not been for my model in the red shirt I should have left my canvas unfinished. Because I should have been stone dead. The sea was enormous. The sun was setting, all lent itself to the occasion, and I saw the land getting further and further away. A wave fifteen feet high engulfed me, I drank a ton of salt water, passed through it, to be swallowed up in a second twenty feet high, in which I turned round like a catherine-wheel and was overwhelmed by a third. I swam and swam, and the more I swam the less I approached. Ah my dear Fantin, to feel one's useless efforts and lookers-on to be saying, 'But this gentleman is amusing himself; he must be jolly strong.' I cried, I howled in despair, I disappeared three, four times. At last they understood. A brave railway contractor ran and was twice rolled over on the beach. The bathing-attendant, my model, heard the call and arrived at a galop, jumped into the sea like a Newfoundland, succeeded in catching my hand and the two pulled me out."

His correspondence shows him to have been in Amsterdam for the first time in 1863, expressing his admiration for *The Night Watch* and his disdain for Van der Helst, whom he qualified as mediocre and no more.

Before 1863 the Salons were held only every other year. There was one in 1859, and consequently none in 1860. In 1861 Whistler must have declined to send, for he was not among the exhibitors, and I cannot discover that he was rejected this year, or, if so, what picture he could have sent. As there was no Salon

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in 1862, it was not till 1863 that he repeated his first attempt of 1859 to exhibit. This time he submitted a work, the fruit of a great effort, which exceeded in dimensions anything he had hitherto produced. It was *The White Girl.* This was again refused by the jury, the enemy then of all originality and anchored in old traditions. But this year, on the intervention of the Emperor Napoleon III., the rejected were allowed to exhibit at the Palace de l'Industrie, the same place where the official Salon was held and where a special room was allotted to them. Thus there was, in 1863, a " Salon des Refusés " which has become famous. There one saw Bracquemond, Cals, Cazin, Chintreuil, Fantin-Latour, Harpignies, Jongkind, Jean Paul Laurens, Legros, Manet, Pissarro, Vollon and Whistler.

*The White Girl* was the picture best received at the Salon des Refusés, both by artists and critics. She was a young Irish girl whom Whistler had taken as a model. He also made of her head an etching known as *Jo.* Courbet, having found her with Whistler at Trouville in 1866, also found occasion to paint her with her wonderful head of hair. He made two portraits, one of which was called *La Belle Irlandaise*; the other was shown at the exhibition of his works in the École des Beaux-Arts in 1882, with the title, *Jo, femme d'Irlande.*

*The White Girl* stands life-size, clothed in white, against a white curtain. Her unbound hair falls over her shoulders and she holds in her left hand, close to her body, a white flower. Her expression is thoughtful and mysterious. Paul Mantz said of the painting, in the *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*: "*The White Girl* of M. James Whistler is a morsel full of flavour. There exhales from it a strange charm." And Burger-Thore, in his *Salon*, said : " The image is rare, conceived and painted like a vision, which belongs not to all the world but to a poet." Ernest Chesneau, in his book, *L'Art et les Artistes Modernes*, published in 1864, expressed his attraction thus : " I feel a particular weakness for this work, which is not without defects, but reveals superior picturesque

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qualities, an imagination amorous of dreams and poetry." Fernand Desnoyers, in a booklet on the *Salon des Refusés*, has described it as follows :—" The most original and singular painting is that of M. Whistler. The title of his picture is *La Fille blanche*. It is the portrait of a spirit, a medium. The figure, the attitude, the physiognomy, the colour are all strange. It is at the same time simple and fantastic. The face has a tormented and charming expression which rivets the attention. There is something vague and profound in the gaze of this young girl, who is of so individual a beauty that the public does not know whether to find her ugly or pretty. This portrait is alive. It is a remarkable painting."

By the year 1863 then, Whistler, both as etcher and painter, had shown his originality and produced extraordinary works. From the beginning he had felt himself drawn towards the two arts of painting and etching, and he had cultivated them both in parallel—that is the right word, for with him the two arts never impinged one on the other. Whether he painted or whether he etched, he executed each time before the model or the view seen an original work, destined never to be repeated by another process than that which had given it birth. All his life he pursued the two arts in the same manner. The etcher and the painter form constantly the double aspect of his personality.

From 1859 Whistler had played shuttlecock between Paris and London, dividing his time between the two cities. In 1863 he fixed his residence in London.

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## CHAPTER III

## IN LONDON

In London Whistler rejoined his family. Settled there were one of his half-brothers, an engineer, his half-sister Mrs Seymour Haden, and his mother, who had left America and now lived with her second son, William, a rising doctor.

At the time when he was residing principally in Paris Whistler had occasionally worked in London and exhibited there. In 1859 he had begun his series of etchings of the Thames, and in that year showed some of his engraved work at the Royal Academy. There also, in 1860, he exhibited his picture, *At the Piano*. In 1862 he contributed four drawings as illustrations to *Once a Week*, engraved on wood by Swain, and two others to *Good Words*, the woodcuts by Dalziel. The ten years following his establishment in London were fertile in achievements of great power and variety. His various gifts finding their scope in different directions, he produced works in which the originality of his genius was developed to the full.

Whistler had been greatly struck by the decorative colour scale of the Japanese. He painted several pictures in which he proceeded to adopt it, making use of Japanese costumes and accessories, reproduced in all the daring of the original tints. He became a great enthusiast of blue and white Chinese porcelain, the collection of which, partly owing to his example, afterwards became the vogue in London. It has been asserted that Rossetti was the first to form this particular taste, and that Whistler only borrowed it from him. It had, however, always been common to



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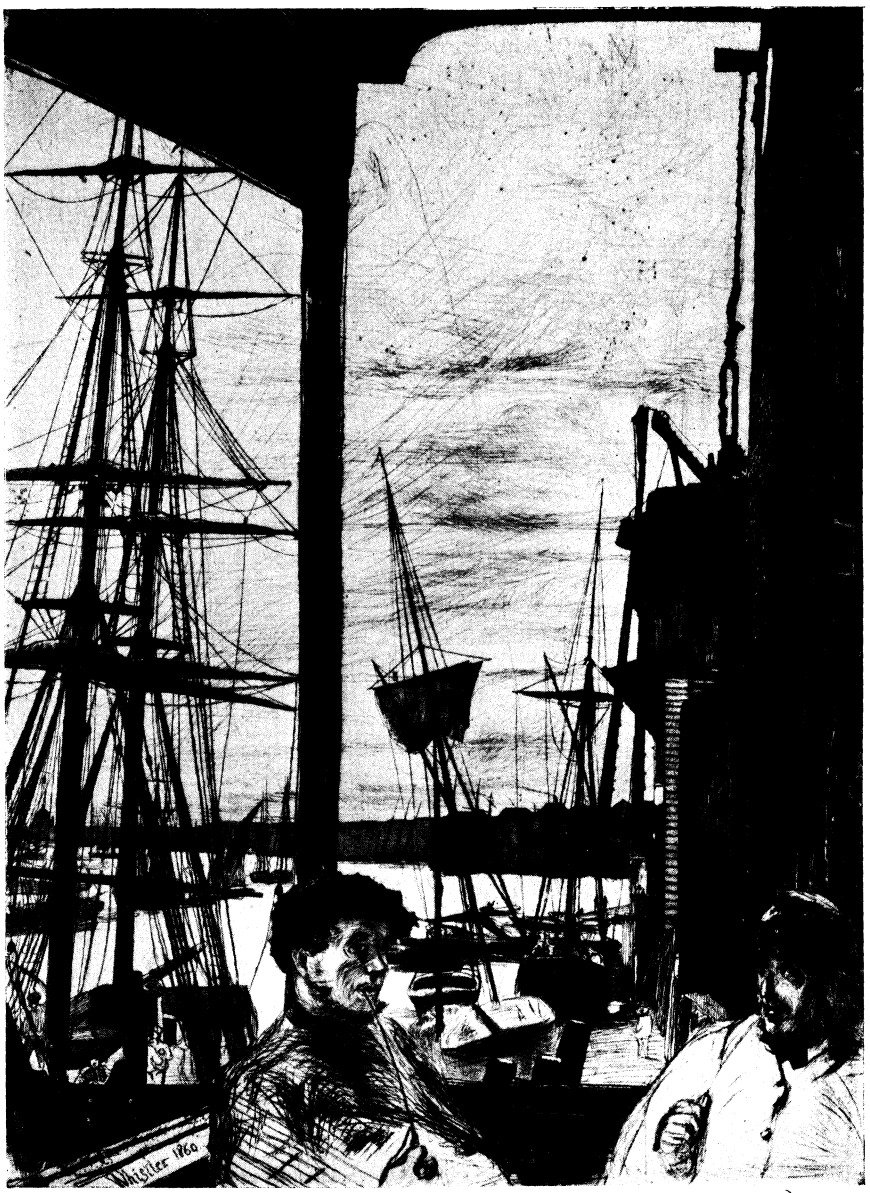


THE THAMES AT ROTHERHITHE

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them both; they devoted themselves to the joys of collecting simultaneously, and it is impossible to determine the question as to who should have the credit of the initiative. What is certain is that Whistler loved to grace his house with blue and white Chinese porcelain, and that he introduced it decoratively into the interiors which he arranged or inspired.

Under the direction of this influence he painted, in 1864, *The Gold Screen*, a young woman in Japanese costume seated and placed against a background filled with a number of variously coloured objects. About the same time he painted the much more important *La Princesse du Pays de la Porcelaine*. The woman stands, life-size, wearing a Japanese dress of brilliant colours. The title indicates that the painter wished to affirm the fanciful character of the subject. In spite of her Eastern costume, the Princess remains emphatically European in her face, with its expression of melancholy and languor. The sitter on this occasion was Miss Christina Spartali, daughter of the Greek Consul-General in London, the picture being in effect her portrait. Christina Spartali had a sister, Marie, afterwards Mrs Stillman, who had been a pupil of Rossetti. He used her as a model, and introduced her, with certain modifications, in a number of his pictures, and notably in one of his best-known works, *Fiametta*. Thus it happened that *La Princesse du Pays de la Porcelaine*, by reason of the family likeness common to the two sisters, Christina and Marie Spartali, presented a type peculiar to Rossetti. It is doubtless owing to this circumstance that it has been said that at a certain period Whistler was subject to Rossetti's influence. But the apparent similarity between the two artists is due only to the use of similar models of a very striking physiognomy, for a close examination of methods reveals no hint of any borrowing by Whistler from Rossetti. *La Princesse du Pays de la Porcelaine*, accepted by the Salon in 1865, was the first work of its author to be exhibited in any official exhibition in Paris. In the same style as that of the two pictures just mentioned, Whistler painted *The*

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*Lange Leizen*, exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1864, and *The Balcony*, perhaps the most frankly Japanese of all his works, also shown at the Academy in 1870. It depicts a group of women on a balcony dressed in variously coloured Japanese costumes.

At the same period he painted *The Little White Girl*, adhering, however, to his earlier manner and introducing only one Japanese detail, a fan. The picture is also known as *Symphony in White No. 2*, and was exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1870. Like *The White Girl* shown at the Salon des Refusés in Paris in 1863, the picture derived its name from the girl's white dress. It is a work full of charm, intensely alive. The fair, sad little girl stands with one arm resting on the mantelpiece, the other hanging straight down, a Japanese fan in her hand. Above the mantelpiece is a mirror, in which the head is reflected. After having seen the picture in Whistler's studio Swinburne wrote the poem, *Before the Mirror*, afterwards included in *Poems and Ballads*.

"Come snow, come wind or thunder,
High up in air,
I watch my face and wonder
At my bright hair.
Nought else exists or grieves
The rose at heart, that heaves
With love of her own leaves, and lips that pair.

I cannot tell what pleasures
Or what pains were,
What pale new loves and treasures
New years will bear;
What beam will fall, what shower
With grief or joy for dower,
But one thing knows the flower, the flower is fair."

He also painted a *Symphony in White No. 3*, exhibited at the Academy in 1867. Two young women, enveloped in the flowing

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folds of long white dresses, recline negligently on a sofa, the tone of which harmonises with that of the figures themselves, while a fan on the floor and the flowers of an azalea in a corner exhibit points of colour on the dominant white of the canvas.

At this period Whistler finally entered upon his career as a painter of portraits. Portraiture, to which he devoted himself till the end, formed from now onwards a determinate part of his achievement. He conceived his portraits from an essentially artistic point of view. He regarded them not merely as representations of types and faces; he endeavoured to realise in them combinations of colour and arrangements of pure painting. With this intention he executed two particularly important portraits, those of his mother and Carlyle. *The Little White Girl* and the *Symphony in White No. 3* had been painted in a scale of very bright tones, in full light; they were portraits of girls and women in the freshness and brilliance of youth. Taking now for his subject a rendering of old age, he chose, as appropriate to the end in view, an arrangement of sombre tones, a general veil of black wedded to grey. Though he usually preferred to pose his models standing, he naturally shrank from subjecting old people to a prolonged pose in this position. For them, therefore, he invented a very simple attitude of repose, which, however, had a certain novelty in it. He arranged them in profile, seated. Before the portrait of his mother it is impossible not to feel some emotion. This old lady, in an attitude so natural, her hands crossed so simply on her knees, is the image of old age itself, with its dignity, its sadness, its resignation.

Although the pose in the portrait of Carlyle was fundamentally the same as that of his mother, Whistler avoided a pure and simple repetition of his first effect by resting the right hand of his model on a stick, putting a felt hat on his knee and draping his legs with a cloak. Carlyle must not be given the credit of wishing to have his portrait done by Whistler because he recognised his merit and esteemed him to be a great painter. Carlyle, to whom

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painting is said to have been a closed book, lived near to Whistler in Cheyne Walk, and it was merely as a friend and neighbour that he consented to sit for him. Whistler, having made the acquaintance of the Sage, asked if he might paint him, and Carlyle, who enjoyed the hours that he spent sitting and talking to Whistler as a relaxation from work, was probably quite unaware of the fact that the finest portrait of him that posterity was to possess was then being painted.

Chelsea, where Carlyle and Whistler lived, was at that time a quiet district, a kind of isolated suburb of London. Cheyne Walk consisted of a row of old and picturesque houses, looking out on to a garden planted with trees which extended almost to the bank of the river. There the painter found subjects ready waiting for him. The Thames, Chelsea Old Church, with its square tower, Battersea Bridge, with its great piers, which Whistler delighted to introduce into his etchings and pictures, these continually intrigued his vision when he lived in Cheyne Walk. This tranquil and unique spot was full of charm for artists, and, in addition to Carlyle and Whistler, at that time Rossetti, Swinburne and Meredith also lived there.

After he had painted the portrait of his mother, in 1871-1872, and while he was at work on that of Carlyle, Whistler began the portraits of the two elder daughters of Mr W. C. Alexander. Working on them almost simultaneously, he painted the elder sister, Agnes Mary, in a rather sombre scheme of greys, and the younger, Cicely Henrietta, in a bright harmony of grey and green. Painted in sombre tones like the portraits of his mother and Carlyle, the portrait of the elder of the two sisters forms the third work executed in the same colour-scale. The bright painting of the portrait of the younger sister was in contrast to this series, Whistler always aiming at the greatest possible variety of effects. It was on this portrait that he worked with most zest, and accordingly he very soon completed it. The painting of the other portrait had been suspended, and could not be continued, on

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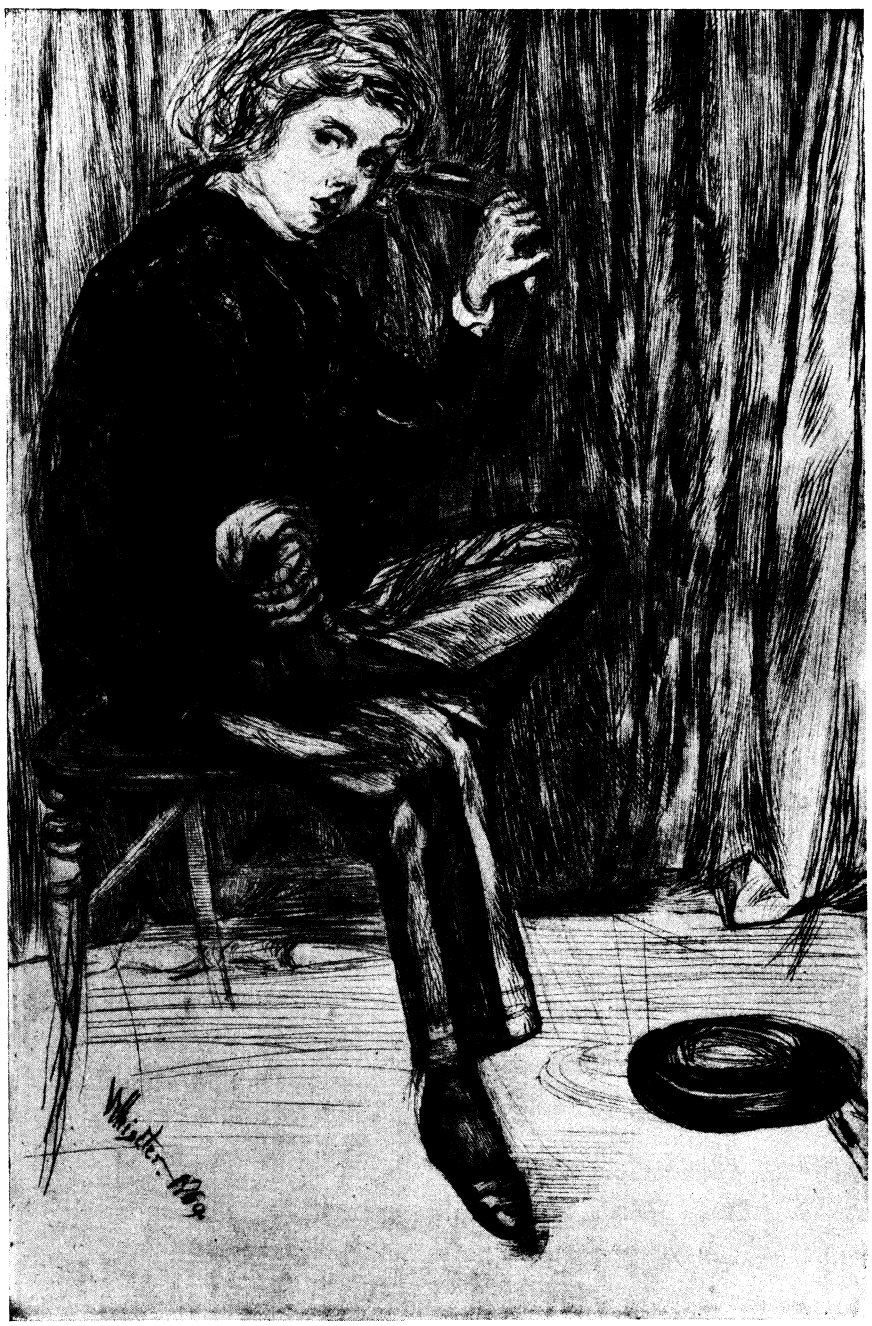

ARTHUR HADEN

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account of an illness of the model; although in a considerably advanced state, it remains an unfinished work.

The dark portrait of the elder sister is that to which the title *Miss Alexander* should properly belong, but; being unfinished, it has remained comparatively unknown, and the title has now become definitely attached to the portrait of the younger sister. Miss Alexander (Cicely Henrietta) is seen standing, wearing a short white dress, relieved with accessories of black and grey, holding a large hat with feathers in her hand. The picture's peculiar high scale of tones gave it a character *sui generis*, which at first caused English critics to fall foul of it. The father of the girl, Mr W. C. Alexander, a man of wealth and open-minded, was one of the first in England to feel the attraction of the products of Japanese art and become a collector of them. At the same time he had learnt to understand Whistler, and allowed him every latitude, in painting his daughters, to follow out his own ideas and invention. To the portraits of his two elder daughters Whistler was to have added that of the third daughter, Grace, but of this project only a sketch remains.

Whistler now invented one of his most daring and individual colour schemes, consisting of building up his pictures on a ground of black, black absolute, not in order to throw into relief or contrast the lighter passages, but with a sense of its proper value as a colour, carried to its furthest power and designed to form the dominant note of the picture. The first picture that he painted of this order was, I believe, the *Arrangement in Black and White No. 1*, exhibited at the Grosvenor Gallery in 1878, and afterwards remaining for a long time in the collection of Dr Linde of Lubeck. It is known in Germany under the title of *The American*. The subject is a young woman, standing erect, fronting the spectator, full of action and movement, a boa round her neck, her hands resting on her hips. A deep black forms the background. M. Heilbut, in an account of Dr Linde's collection which appeared in the Berlin art journal, *Kunst und Künstler*, writes of Whistler's

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work as follows:—"This American girl, strange and remote, does not start out from the background, but rather leads us into it. She stands there in front of us, waiting until our eyes have become accustomed to the shadow that enwraps her, and among the general forms we are able to distinguish details which, while not definitely stated in paint, are at length evoked. The originality of Whistler appears here complete." The picture now forms part of the collection of Mr Charles Freer of Detroit.

Now that he had discovered the value of this treatment of black, it became Whistler's chosen method, the one that he repeated most often. It permitted him; in effect, to realise on canvas those shrouded and fantastic forms which embodied themselves in his vision. Simultaneously with *The American* he painted, in arrangements of blacks, the back view, three-quarter-length portrait of *Miss Rosa Corder*, the artist, caught in a delightfully easy pose; *The Fur Jacket*, the portrait of a young woman of fashion with a somewhat melancholy air, standing; Irving in the part of Philip II., perched, as it were, on his legs, in the jerky manner that he affected on the stage. In 1877 he painted, again upon a black ground, Mrs Louis Huth, a woman of great distinction.

During the years in which Whistler was producing these numerous pictures he also executed many etchings of scenes and people. In 1871 he published, through Ellis & Green of London, a series of sixteen plates, known as his *English Set*, and consisting principally of views of the Thames produced at different periods. Rising above the river are seen Chelsea Church, Hungerford and Westminster Bridges, the warehouses where the cargoes are discharged; lower down, the long strings of barges and lighters, vessels moored against the docks or ships bringing fish to Billingsgate Market.

These views of the Thames are rare creative visions which, with all their wealth of exact detail, preserve their forcefulness intact and pierce to the very heart of things. They are akin to those

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pictures of the extraordinarily faithful Dutch masters, the effect of which is to produce a kind of transposition in the mind of the spectator who views the actual scene that has been represented, causing him to attribute its living reality to the painter himself, so that when he sees a field in Holland with grazing cattle he exclaims: "What a fine Cuyp!" Similar exclamations have been uttered by critics familiar with the works of Whistler, and especially with his nocturnes. The German Muther and the French Gustave Geffroy tell us, independently of one another, that on crossing the Channel at night, when they came upon the English coast, and saw the points of light piercing the mist and the gloom, they exclaimed: "A Whistler!" The same sort of expression must have been provoked by these views of the Thames.

It is a remarkable thing, however, that they first gave the English public an impression of strangeness and novelty. Artists had not yet learnt the humility of vision that condescends to things of low degree. The London of buildings and business had been disregarded as vulgar and prosaic. Artists, when they wished to draw or paint the Thames, were accustomed to go up the river to Richmond or Henley, where they discovered those views which alone seemed to them to possess the qualities of dignity and picturesqueness. There are artists, however, who draw from within themselves the charm and beauty that are revealed in their works. As soon as Whistler had recorded those aspects of the Thames in mid-London, which before had appeared so mean and commonplace, the charm that they had to offer began to be recognised, and he was followed by a crowd of imitators who devoted pencil and needle to the rediscovery of the hitherto neglected London of the river-side.

Whistler did not confine his studies of the Thames and its banks to his etched work; they formed the subject of his pictures, among which may be named *Old Battersea Bridge*, *The Frozen Thames*, *Chelsea under Ice*. In the summers of 1865 and 1866



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he joined Courbet at Trouville. Influenced by Courbet's paintings of sea-shores with vast skies, Whistler also attacked the same subject, and in one of his pictures he introduced the figure of his friend. Later on he painted pure seascapes, particularly during his stay at Valparaiso, in South America, whither he took a voyage for the benefit of his health.

We have seen that the years which followed Whistler's coming to London witnessed a large output of work of deepening originality and increasing variety. He set foot on various roads leading to regions hitherto unexplored. But in painting deep originality and genuine imagination are not wont to command acceptance all at once; recognition usually comes only in the slow course of time and after a prolonged struggle. Instead of advancing in public favour, Whistler was destined to see that partial welcome and encouragement which had at first been extended to him gradually diminish as his work proceeded to develop. If the first pictures which he sent to the Royal Academy had been readily accepted, if his picture, *At the Piano*, exhibited in 1860, had at once been bought by one of the most prominent Academicians, John Phillip, the portrait of his mother, which he submitted in 1872, had originally been rejected by the committee. The subsequent reversal of their verdict had been due only to the fear of a scandal arising out of the protest of one of the older Academicians, Sir William Boxall, who threatened to resign from the Council unless the picture were accepted. This incident and the general attitude of criticism towards him convinced Whistler that the Royal Academy offered him no sort of scope for the exhibition of his work, and at that time, as regards the exhibition of pictures in London, the Academy enjoyed an absolute monopoly, similar to that possessed by the Salon in Paris.

As the successive exhibitions of Whistler's productions enabled the tendencies and peculiarities of his work to be more clearly seen, the Royal Academy, the critics and the public became more and more hostile to him, and finally took up an attitude of

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A White Note

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undisguised ill-will. Whistler, however, was a fighter. Far from bending before the storm of opposition, he became more rigid. He had the fighting spirit, which rises as difficulties increase and, not content with mere resistance, carries the attack into the enemy's country. He refused to stoop to any concession but declared open war, a war which was to last nearly twenty years, against hostile artists, against the critics, against the Press, against the public.

His determination to go his own way more resolutely than ever naturally suggested to him the idea of showing his work to the public in its entirety. Accordingly, in June, 1874, he held an exhibition of all his works at 48 Pall Mall. If the result of showing his pictures one after another during the course of the last ten years had been to arouse a steadily growing dislike, it was clear that now, when they were seen all together, the effect must necessarily be to force their originality of character into more striking prominence, and thus to provoke a fresh outburst of hostility. This result was bound to happen as a mere consequence of the collective exhibition, whatever steps in other quarters Whistler might have taken to justify or explain himself. But, far from doing anything to modify the unfavourable impression which was naturally to be anticipated, he, on the contrary, provided the public with a new ground of irritation by introducing into the catalogue a peculiar species of nomenclature.

For some time he had been in the habit of giving his works descriptive sub-titles borrowed from musical terms. This practice had formed one of the reasons of his difficulty in getting his works accepted by the Academy—his demand that this unprecedented kind of nomenclature should be inserted in the catalogue had been strenuously opposed—and it had also been one of the causes of his increasing unpopularity with the public. In a private exhibition, where he was master and could do as he liked, he was about to make a rule of what hitherto he could only make an exception. Almost all his paintings had as title or sub-title

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a description intended to denote the sought-out combination of colours, and these descriptions were taken from musical terms, the use of which he systematically extended to the domain of painting. In the catalogue were found works entitled: *Harmony in Grey and Peach-Colour, Symphony in Blue and Rose, Variations in Blue and Green.*

The idea of combinations of colour, the search for values, the importance attached to the colour scheme are ideas now sufficiently widespread to be accepted everywhere, but which were absolutely foreign to the spirit of England at the time when Whistler brought them out. Painters then had quite other outlooks than the research of the palette. And since Whistler came to give, above all, as the foundation of his art, combinations of pure painting and material beauty, he was so far from the beaten path that he remained, for this very reason, misunderstood and excited general disapprobation.

When, in addition, he was seen to adopt systematically a language which hitherto had only belonged to music, the hostility to him took on the character of a revolt. The best disposed gave as the cause of his conduct that natural eccentricity which they attributed to him, but others openly accused him of charlatanism and imposture. For years there was no kind of attack, insult or contempt which this phraseology borrowed from music did not draw down upon him from the critics and the public.

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## CHAPTER IV

### ARRANGEMENTS, HARMONIES, SYMPHONIES, NOCTURNES AND VENICE ETCHINGS

WHISTLER'S choice of musical phraseology to describe the aspects of his painting, however original and unforeseen it may have been, was legitimate, for it corresponded truly with a reality. When *The White Girl* was shown at the Salon des Refusés in 1863, people had been struck by the combination of colours presented. The standing figure detached itself from the white curtain. There was here a particular arrangement of colour, white on white, which indicated a true painter, a man given to looking at objects in his own fashion. The original combination of colour, once realised, was repeated in different scales. It was not born of caprice, but came from a natural and profound way of seeing things, and consequently was bound to persist. But as the work grew, as the painter produced new pictures varied in their combinations of colour, he felt the need of qualifying what at first he had left without particular denomination. Musical phraseology offered this, and he took it. Indeed, it furnished him with expressions exactly appropriate to what he wished to bring into prominence. The words "harmony," "symphony," as used in music, served to denote the beauty, charm and value of sounds, and what Whistler introduced into his painting was a beauty, a charm of colour, precious of itself and distinct from the subject, the first cause of the picture.

His works then could well carry two titles. In a portrait, for example, he naturally had to name the model painted, and so the



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picture was called: *Portrait of Carlyle, Portrait of Miss Alexander,* but as Carlyle and Miss Alexander had been painted by the aid of a combination of colours which was precious in itself and itself intended to charm, he added to the name of the model a title describing the combination realised, and said: *Portrait of Carlyle, Arrangement in Grey and Black*; *Portrait of Miss Alexander, Harmony in Grey and Green.* In a picture by Whistler, beside the subject properly so called, there was also an arrangement or harmony of colour that one might call decorative, using the word in its highest sense and as it was understood by the artists of the Far East. In fact, he was inspired by the decorative colour scale of Japan and China, towards which he had been drawn by a kind of natural affinity.

Since Whistler realised, in addition to the subject, purely decorative combinations of colour, he was inevitably brought to give first place to this combination in the titles of certain pictures. For example, when several repeated, with different motives, the same combination, he called them by the same title, derived from this, and distinguished one from another simply by numerals, calling them *Symphony in White, No. 1, No. 2, No. 3.*

He was to take the final step on the path of decoration.

Not content with applying his colour combinations to definite subjects and portraits, he wished to use them alone and so arrive at pure decoration. This, as a matter of fact, he had already achieved, and his work in this direction was not that to which he had attached the least importance. Every house he lived in, he hastened to paint the wainscoting and walls, according to a colour scheme which would satisfy his eyes. And when he held private exhibitions the decorative arrangement of the rooms formed a part of his preoccupation.

His most important mural decoration was conceived and executed in 1873, in the dining-room of a house in Prince's Gate, London, belonging to Mr Leyland, a wealthy shipowner. As pure decoration was in question here, the colour combination

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PORTRAIT OF MY MOTHER

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naturally took the lead in the description of the work, which is called : HARMONY IN BLUE AND GOLD, and, as sub-title, *The Peacock Room*, with this explanation : "The peacock serves as a means to effect the desired arrangement of colours." The decoration, which covers the ceilings and walls of the apartment, consists of two motives, one borrowed from the feathers in the tail of the peacock, the other from those of its throat, more delicate and differently iridescent. The two motives combined to give variety to the design. At the same time, to give variety to the colour, the motives are sometimes painted in gold on blue, sometimes in blue on a gold background. At the end of the room two great peacocks, in gold on a blue ground, defied one another and challenged to combat. This decoration forms a whole of singular elegance and luxuriance.[1]

While he painted the Peacock Room Whistler had established intimate relations with Mr Leyland, who had allowed him to undertake painting himself and his family. Whistler thus came to portray them in different ways. He painted Mr Leyland, standing, an arrangement in grey and black, Mrs Leyland in pale rose with flowers here and there of a darker shade. He made portraits of the three daughters, Fanny, Florence and Elinor, in etchings. He also began their portraits in oils, but they remained unfinished studies, and he further made pen-drawings and etchings of several other members of the family.

To resume, Whistler founded his art of painting on the combination and arrangement of colours. Beauty of material, the values of the things painted, the charm to be drawn from the association of colours, are qualities essential to be obtained if a painting is to be truly a work of art. But the fact of holding these ideas and applying them placed Whistler in an isolated and generally considered inferior position. His æsthetics, based on research and qualities that were supposed to be of a purely

[1] This decoration, taken away from the room in which it was originally painted, is now in the house of Mr Freer at Detroit, U.S.A.

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material character, appeared futile and contemptible. He was accused of being unable to speak to the spirit, of neglecting that intellectual domain where, according to the men listened to, painting should raise and maintain itself. This arose from the fact that at this period in England the painters had a vision that we can call literary. Their pictures sought, above all, to recommend themselves by subjects taken from mythology, legend or history. They sought to represent persons engaged in well-determined actions. They were intended to retain attention by an execution precise and carried to a high point of what was called "finish." So Whistler, with his contrary ideas, could say of them: "They may be finished, but they have certainly never been begun."

The disdain shown for the art of Whistler we shall understand better when we know what at that time was the feeling of the artistic groups, both that which, with the Royal Academy, represented tradition, and that of the dissentients who had set themselves apart.

The Royal Academy possesses great prestige in England. It goes back to the eighteenth century, and so already has a long past. It is the only body formed of a limited number of members which enjoys an official position, legally recognised. Thus it occupies in the world of art a rank analogous to that held by the French Academy in the world of letters. It organises annually, in the month of May, an exhibition to which the fashionable world comes to look at pictures and at the same time to show itself off. At the opening of its exhibition the Academy receives, at a banquet, princes of the Royal family, members of the aristocracy, representatives of the army and navy. Its president makes a speech, in which art and artists are placed in light which may be most pleasing to the hearers and the whole nation outside. It is evident that such a body can never be disposed to encourage audacity or welcome great originality. Further, one may say that artists who in their youth and

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beginnings had the promise of distinction, when with the coming of age and success they enter it, round off their angles and lose a part of their flavour. Whistler, at first accepted by the Royal Academy, was judged eccentric as soon as he began going differently from others and accentuating his own manner, and so offended the wisdom and prudence of the authorities that they would no longer allow him to show with them in their exhibitions.

Besides the Royal Academy there existed then in England dissenting artists, gifted with originality in their way, who had developed an art and made proselytes. But Whistler, though a dissenter himself, with his colour combinations and his purely painter-like research, found himself in reality even further from these than from all others, for they more than all the others had adopted a system of æsthetics based on literature. It is a remarkable thing that if we compare the dissenting painters who arose in France and England we shall see that in these two countries they developed in an absolutely opposite way. Whereas France, with Corot, Courbet, Manet and the Impressionists, had seen painting more and more ridding itself of all extraneous assistance in order that it might live on itself, seeking out, above all, qualities of the palette and colour values, in England, painting, with Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Burne-Jones, had despised researches of a purely pictorial order so as to attach itself, perhaps more than ever before, to literature and to apply itself to the rendering of abstract sentiments.

Rossetti, born in England of an English mother and an Italian father, and a Latin in disposition beneath an English envelope, had been the directing spirit of this group of artists. Gifted with originality and inventiveness, he was at the same time poet and painter, but as one cannot be equally superior in both arts, with him it was the poet who took the lead. The poet knew the conditions of life and of beauty in poetry, and knew how to apply them in his verses; but the painter was not equally enlightened, and was ignorant of the ways which could have put his painting

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on a level with his poetry. His personages were kept in an ecstasy or shown with mystical expressions. His painting, though powerful, lacked the great qualities of the palette; it was dry, without true transparence or velvetyness, and the drawing remained laborious.

Arriving in England, Whistler had found Rossetti there, his elder by six years, in the full tide of production, and already famous. He had gone to see him and had been very well received. Rossetti appreciated the merits of the new arrival, and sought to make him known. He took some of his pictures home to show them to his friends. They lived close to one another in Cheyne Walk, Chelsea. Thus there was established between them those intimate relations which arise among young men who feel a common creative power and mutually value each other. Nevertheless, their propensities were by nature so different that as they developed they were bound to go opposite ways and conduct themselves, as it were, to the antipodes. Under these conditions the relations formed in youth could not continue, and in the end Rossetti and Whistler kept themselves apart.

At the point where we are, Rossetti, approaching the end of his career, was retiring from the battlefield, and it was Burne-Jones who, having experienced his influence and adopted his æsthetics, was continuing it in his own way. Burne-Jones leant primarily upon poetry and legend. His figures formed scenes and were calculated to arrest the spectator by what they said to him or what they made him imagine, but they often had need of explanation and literary comment. Burne-Jones lacked the power of Rossetti; his painting was without brilliance and almost unhealthy, but it showed imagination and distinction. It could please those who before a picture only asked to be allowed to exercise their mind in recalling history or in giving rein to a dream while absorbed in a legend.

The Pre-Raphaelites, Rossetti and Burne-Jones, succeeding one another, had recruited adherents and got together a little world of

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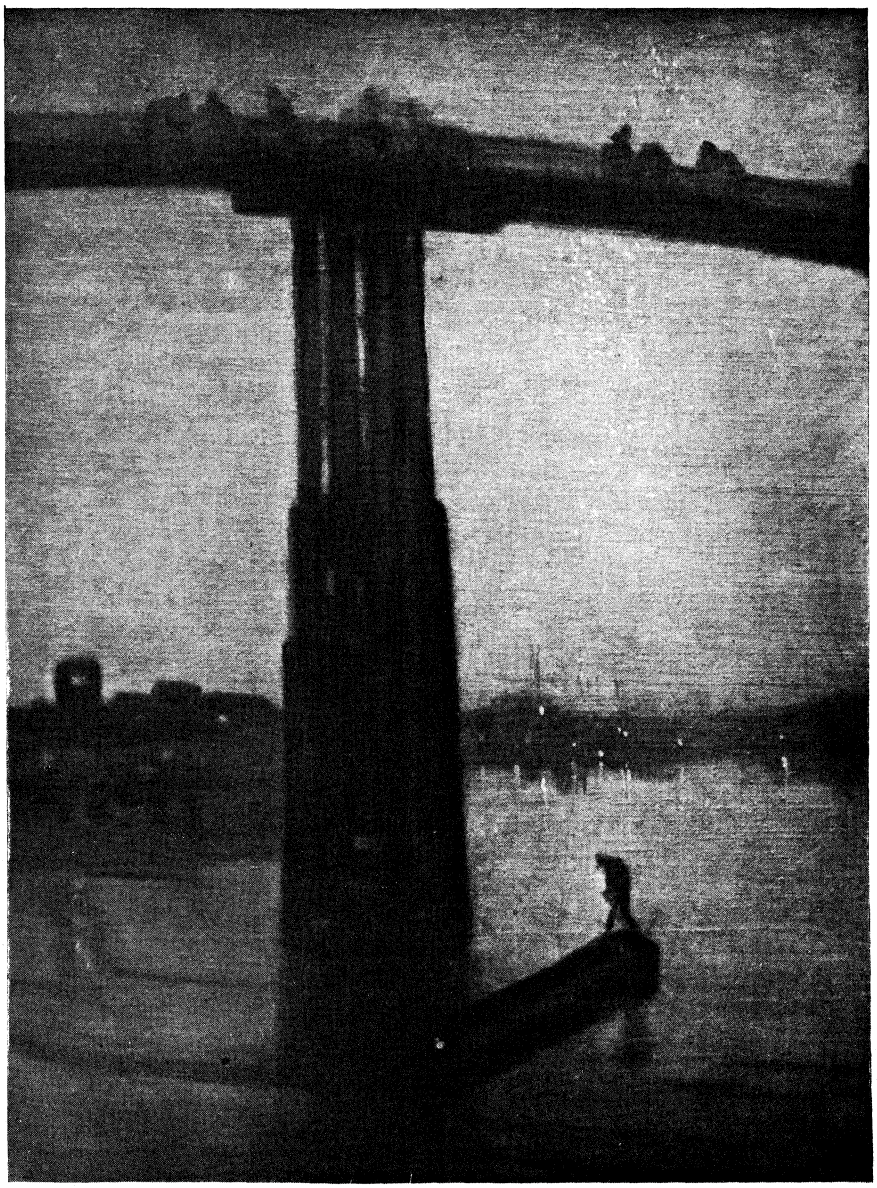

Old Battersea Bridge

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literary people, artists, amateurs and sentimental women, who had adopted a way of making themselves peculiar. They were what one called "æsthetes." For some years they showed themselves on the surface of English society and made themselves much remarked, to disappear afterwards as rapidly as artificial things disappear. At the period with which we are dealing—1875 to 1880—they were in all their glory. Their sentimentalism, their affectation of nonchalance and of artistic refinement, their manner of clothing themselves, recalling the long robes of Botticelli among the women, attracted attention to them and kept them distinct.

Now there happened in London one of the happiest events for the dissenters of painting, the opening of the Grosvenor Gallery. Up to this time the Royal Academy, with its annual exhibition, had enjoyed a practical monopoly in exhibiting pictures, and the artists it rejected or who shunned it were reduced to exhibiting aside in badly conducted places. Then Sir Coutts Lindsay, a rich banker who patronised the arts and himself practised painting, had the Grosvenor Gallery built in Bond Street. It was destined for annual exhibitions of painting, and the first opened in May 1877. Sir Coutts Lindsay did not intend to exclude the Royal Academy painters; on the contrary, he tried to get their work, nevertheless, as it was necessary to present visitors with something particular as an excuse for his enterprise, he gave considerable space to the dissenting artists who had given up or kept away from the Royal Academy. Now these dissenters, in the most opposite styles, were Whistler and Burne-Jones.

The exhibitions at the Grosvenor Gallery, eclectic in character, certainly attracted at the same time both connoisseurs and the general public. Whistler, in 1874, had an exhibition in Pall Mall, where he could only address himself to a restricted number of visitors. Now in 1877 he could show himself before all London. He was not the man to let such an opportunity escape him, and

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as there was in him a fighter determined never to concede anything to popular taste, he proceeded to make such a choice of his works that he could reveal himself for this once in his most daring aspect. At the opening of the Grosvenor Gallery, then, he made his appearance with seven pictures: the portrait of Carlyle, entitled *An Arrangement in Brown*; the portrait of the actor, Irving, as Philip II., described as *Arrangement in Black No. 3*; a *Harmony in Amber and Black*; and finally four nocturnes, two in blue and silver, one in blue and gold, and one in black and gold. The nocturnes, on their appearance, were found to shock the conventions then observed in painting even more than the harmonies and symphonies. They represented the extreme point of originality to which Whistler went, but they also excited a corresponding hostility and became the cause of the worst attacks and insults he had to endure.

The nocturnes, as their name indicates, are night effects. Particularities of scene and landscape no longer exist there except as accessories. The limpidity of the atmosphere, and water illumined by the pale rays of the moon, mysterious shadows, the great silhouettes of dark nights, these have become the objective. Let us take one of the lightest nocturnes in blue and silver, place ourselves at ten paces' distance and regard it attentively. The sight which the painter has wished to fix on his canvas is that of moonshine on a fine night. He has chosen as subject a river with its banks, because he needs, above all, a motive to carry the colour, but the motive does not exist for its own sake, since the banks of the river can hardly be distinguished, wrapt as they are in the night effect which is the picture. And the things summoned to convey the desired sensation are neither lines nor contours, but a silvery blue colour scheme, covering all the canvas with its modifications of light and shade. Indeed, in this nocturne there are only two things without fixed shapes and yet clearly perceptible: air and a scale of transparent tones.

The nocturnes presented themselves so naturally to Whistler

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that, after having painted a great number in oils, he produced them also by etching and lithography. With them he ran through a whole series of night effects and of days darkened by the London fogs. He went in for moonlights, leaving a real light still in the picture, for black nights which plunged everything into shadow. He arrived there at a limit one does not know how to pass. He attained to that extreme region where painting, having become vague, in taking one more step would fall into absolute indefiniteness and could no longer say anything to the eyes.

The nocturnes are full of deep sincerity, and if they give an impression of mystery and allow silhouettes to be seen which appear as phantoms, it is truly because with the artist the contemplation of night evoked fantastic images. Obscurity was alive for Whistler; it called him. When those who liked full daylight had finished their work, and had gone home after the sunset they had admired, then Whistler went out of his house. He expressed his preference for nocturnal or twilight landscape when, in his *Ten O'Clock*, he said :

"The sun blares, the wind blows from the east, the sky is bereft of cloud, and without, all is of iron . . . and the painter turns aside to shut his eyes. . . . And when the evening mist clothes the riverside with poetry, as with a veil, and the poor buildings lose themselves in the dim sky, and the tall chimneys become campanili, and the warehouses are palaces in the night, and the whole city hangs in the heavens, and fairyland is before us—then the wayfarer hastens home; the working man and the cultured one, the wise man and the one of pleasure, cease to understand, as they have ceased to see, and Nature . . . sings her exquisite song to the artist alone." [1]

But in 1877 his views on the poetry of night were unknown,

[1] *The Gentle Art of Making Enemies*, p. 144.—*Trans.*

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and had they been known they would have been despised. The nocturnes, as things without a precedent, seemed to have been conceived and executed outside reason. One can imagine the bewilderment of visitors accustomed to lean over the rail to examine, with eyes glued to the canvas, scenes pushed to a high point of finish, when they suddenly arrived in front of the nocturnes. At the distance from which people regarded other pictures, these only presented a smear of uniform colour, allowing nothing distinct to be discovered. With them painting was carried to its last degree of abstraction. It was separated from any exact motive and from any literary reminiscence. Now, for the public which crowded in 1877 to the Grosvenor Gallery, these things were incomprehensible and monstrous.

The exhibition at the Grosvenor Gallery drew the crowd, and in its midst appeared in force the partisans of the Pre-Raphaelites, the æsthetes. They made the gallery their chosen home. They came to it as a kind of temple where they could give free rein to their admiration. In truth, the artist on whom the cult was then concentrated, the master who made pupils and kept his disciples in the good path, Burne-Jones, showed himself there in his most accentuated form. He sent a series of drawings and paintings : *The Deception of Merlin, The Days of Creation, The Mirror of Venus, A Knight and a Sybil,* allegorical figures ; *Faith, Hope and Temperance.* These works, based on legend and mythology, carried to a high degree of finish in execution, reproducing forms and contours borrowed from the fifteenth century in Italy, formed an absolute contrast with Whistler's pictures shown side by side.

The general public, whatever it thought of Burne-Jones' art, condemned that of Whistler, but the special circle which admired Burne-Jones above all condemned him especially, for the opposition between the two artists was so great that the disparagement of the one was a preliminary rite to the admiring of the other. The most celebrated writer upon art in England, Ruskin, was

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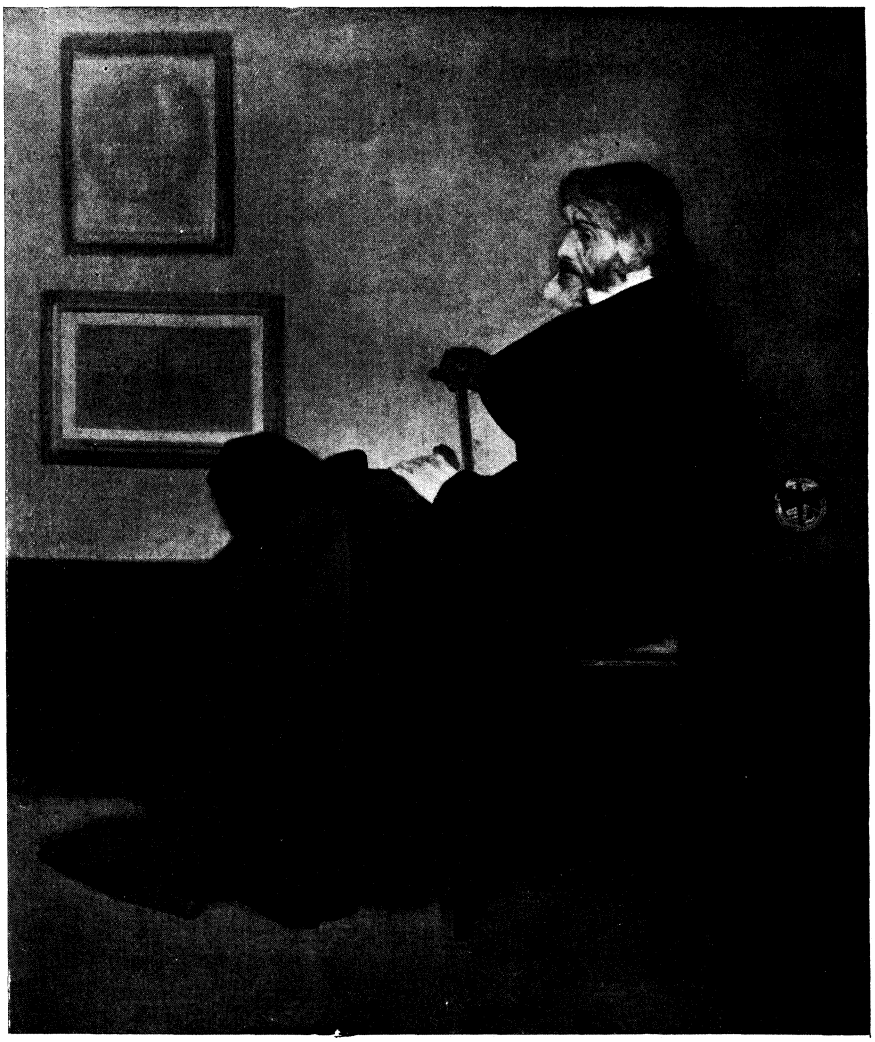

PORTRAIT OF CARLYLE

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about to furnish the proof. I call Ruskin a writer upon art so as not to apply to him the description of critic. If the essential of the critical spirit is to possess that suppleness and impartiality which lead one to understand the most different styles, appreciating each one at its relative value, then never did man less deserve the name of critic than Ruskin. His judgments are extreme, going from extravagant praise to injurious disparagement; in painting, the intrinsic merit of works generally escapes him, his preferences and antipathies being dictated by extraneous reasons derived from the subject. But he was a great writer, a master of language, and his books, remarkable from a literary standpoint, had made him an enormous reputation and given him on art matters an unrivalled influence on the English public. He had taken part in the struggles of the Pre-Raphaelites, and at the disruption of the Brotherhood he had become the particular friend and admirer of Rossetti, whom he had defended in every possible way. He always saw great painters in the Pre-Raphaelites, and his literary preferences masking their failings in the true province of paintings, his admiration of Rossetti was extended to Burne-Jones.

Under the title of *Fors Clavigera*, Ruskin was publishing periodically letters to the workmen of Great Britain. In his seventy-ninth letter,[1] that of 2nd July 1877, he spoke of the exhibition at the Grosvenor Gallery. Here is the verdict he pronounced upon Burne-Jones:

"His work, first, is simply the only art-work at present produced in England which will be received by the future as 'classic' in its kind,—the best that has been or could be. . . . But the action of imagination of the highest power in Burne-Jones, under the condition of scholarship, of social beauty, and of social distress, which necessarily aid, thwart, and colour it, in the nineteenth century, are alone in art,—unrivalled in their kind, and I *know*

[1] *Fors Clavigera*, 1877, vol. vii., pp. 200-201.

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that these will be immortal, as the best things the mid-nineteenth century in England could do."

To this extraordinary apotheosis succeeded an equally extraordinary condemnation of Whistler :

" For Mr Whistler's own sake, no less than for the protection of the purchaser, Sir Coutts Lindsay ought not to have admitted works into the gallery in which the ill-educated conceit of the artist so nearly approached the aspect of wilful imposture. I have seen, and heard, much of Cockney impudence before now, but never expected to hear a coxcomb ask two hundred guineas for flinging a pot of paint in the public's face."

This pot of paint flung in the face of the public had reference to the nocturne in black and gold shown by Whistler. In English exhibitions it is customary to keep a register in which the prices of pictures for sale are marked, and the nocturne in black and gold was entered in this at two hundred guineas. This nocturne, among others, lent itself to attacks, and was evidently a vulnerable point. It represented, on an absolutely black night, the brilliance of fireworks in Cremorne Gardens. Now it is a hazardous experiment to wish to paint a black night, and so it is not astounding that even the spectators, who declared that they still saw something in the nocturnes in blue and silver, the views of the Thames by moonlight, found themselves incapable of discovering anything in the nocturne in black and gold. Ruskin then had certainly attacked Whistler in a weak spot. But other pictures were there, and that he should have believed himself justified in applying the term " coxcomb " to an artist who had painted, among other things, a work like the portrait of Carlyle, suffices to show what his judgments and condemnations were worth.

When the first exhibition at the Grosvenor Gallery closed Whistler had succeeded in making himself known to the public in

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his most characteristic fashion. The row over his pictures had been considerable, all the Press was occupied with it, but the result after all was disastrous. The public carried away from his nocturnes the idea of a desired eccentricity, of a mystification; the criticisms had only been disparagements, and above all towered the insulting verdict of Ruskin.

Whistler was not the man to allow himself to be discouraged. When the second exhibition at the Grosvenor Gallery opened in 1878 one could see that he had not changed. He again showed seven pictures, among the number two figure paintings of women, entitled *Arrangements*, in blue and green, and in white and black, and three Thames nocturnes, one in blue and silver, the two other in blue and gold, and grey and gold. These works, analogous to those of the preceding year, could only confirm the public and critics in their condemnation, and so after the second exhibition he remained in the unfavourable position where the first had placed him.

Nevertheless he felt himself touched by the attacks directed on him otherwise than in his self-esteem as an artist, his interests suffered and he had to recognise that he could no longer sell his pictures. The rich amateurs, on whom he had formerly been able to count, now kept away from him. He could attribute this damage to the fact that his works had not only been censured from an artistic standpoint, but had also been especially attacked as not worth the price at which they were marked. It was Ruskin who had unburdened himself of a denunciation of this kind. In fact, in his violence, he did not limit himself to an artistic judgment, but exceeding the bounds between which critics and artists have a natural right to contend, he had insulted the man he treated as "Cockney" and "coxcomb," and, taking a commercial standpoint—which has nothing to do with artistic merit—he had violently declared that the works produced were not worth the price asked. Ruskin by his conduct had released Whistler from the reserve which an artist



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is obliged to observe towards a writer who, violent in his attacks, remains within the bounds. He had placed himself against Whistler in the position of a chance-comer who insults another man and tries to make him suffer a pecuniary loss, which in fact Whistler had endured.

Now, according to English law, the act of attacking somebody publicly by writing, without proof or sufficient reason, in a way to do him harm, is qualified as "libel." And the libel committed renders him amenable to be brought before a law court and liable to the injured party for costs and damages which, according to the opinion of the jury, may be very heavy. Whistler judged that all the characteristics of a libel were contained in the article in *Fors Clavigera*, and the question before him was whether he should start a lawsuit. For some time he hesitated, but finally the desire to obtain reparation, coupled with his pugnacious spirit, carried him away, and Ruskin was cited for libel.

The case was heard on the 25th and 26th of November 1878, in the Exchequer Court in London, before Mr Justice Huddleston and a special jury. The point to decide was whether the attack of Ruskin was justified or not. Consequently it was necessary to know whether the nocturne in black and gold was, as Ruskin pretended, a pot of paint flung in the face of the public, or if, on the contrary, as Whistler said, it was a work of art of sufficient merit to justify the price of two hundred guineas. Now, since this question had to be decided by the jury, one can see that it took on a desperate aspect. Twelve professional men or small shopkeepers, without any artistic ideas, brought together haphazard, were called upon to become judges of a question about which educated London at the Grosvenor Gallery had proved itself incompetent.

Whistler gave his evidence at the beginning of the first hearing. The counsel for the other side who was cross-examining him having wished to raise a laugh at his expense, Whistler turned the tables and by his retorts put the laughers on his side. When the

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PORTRAIT OF MISS ALEXANDER

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counsel asked if he did not think that the price of two hundred guineas was too high for the nocturne in black and gold, which he admitted having painted in two days, Whistler replied that it was not merely for the work of two days that he demanded payment, but for the knowledge of a lifetime applied to the execution of the work.

Next came, as a most important part of the case, the evidence of the witnesses whom each side produced as experts who could enlighten the jury upon the true character of the nocturne. The principal witnesses for Whistler were William Rossetti, the brother of the painter, and Albert Moore. William Rossetti, speaking first of one of the nocturnes in blue and silver shown at the Grosvenor Gallery, declared that he found it a most artistic rendering of pale moonlight. The nocturne in black and gold which was attacked was not, it was true, so beautiful, but it was nevertheless a work of art, and two hundred guineas was a justifiable price. Albert Moore, a painter of refinement, felt a great admiration for Whistler, and his evidence was unmitigated praise. The nocturnes, in his eyes, were of an elevated tendency; the price of two hundred guineas for the nocturne in black and gold was not excessive.

Ruskin, being ill, did not appear, but among those who gave evidence for him were Tom Taylor, the art critic of *The Times*, and Frith, a member of the Royal Academy. Tom Taylor, a complete journalist, kept to the commonplaces which could satisfy the public: according to him, therefore, the nocturne in black and gold was not a real work of art, and all Mr Whistler's works remained in the state of sketches, not finished. Frith painted pictures like the *Derby Day*, in which were shown a crowd of people minutely detailed. As an artist he was at the opposite pole to Whistler. It was quite natural for him to say that the nocturne in black and gold did not appear to him to be a true work of art. It was not worth two hundred guineas.

Nevertheless the sensational witness that Ruskin produced

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was Burne-Jones: after the praises he had showered upon him it was only natural that he should ask his help. Burne-Jones, without being the great painter that his friends thought him to be, was an artist with high aspirations and a perfectly honourable man. A suspicion of the truth brought him to recognise more merit in Whistler than one might have expected from a man nourished on the ideas he was known to hold. Of the nocturnes in blue and silver, the moonlights, he first of all said:

"The picture representing a night scene on Battersea Bridge is good in colour but bewildering in form; and it has no composition and detail. A day or a day and a half seems a reasonable time within which to paint it. It shows no finish—it is simply a sketch. The nocturne in black and gold has not the merit of the other two pictures, and it would be impossible to call it a serious work of art. Mr Whistler's picture is only one of the thousand failures to paint night. The picture is not worth two hundred guineas." [1]

The Attorney-General who defended Ruskin in the course of his pleading thus summed up his opinion of Whistler's art: he did not know when so much amusement had been afforded to the British public as by Mr Whistler's pictures. Whistler later was often to repeat and quote this phrase as a proof of the lack of artistic judgment in him who had pronounced it, and in those around him whose opinion he reflected.

Altogether the weight of evidence must have appeared to the jury contrary to Whistler's contention that the nocturne in black and gold was a work of art worth two hundred guineas. The nocturne, moreover, had been shown in court, and if it had previously produced such a bad effect on Ruskin and so many others accustomed to see pictures, it must now have been incomprehensible to the jury and have seemed to them to be simply a worthless black smudge. Nevertheless the verdict was in Whistler's favour. Ruskin's attack was recognised as constitut-

[1] *The Gentle Art of Making Enemies*, p. 15.—*Trans.*

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ing a libel, but whereas Whistler had claimed a thousand pounds damages and costs, the jury only gave him a farthing. That is to say, the jury condemned Ruskin morally for the harmful violence of his attack, but recognised that his opinion on the artistic and commercial value of the nocturne was fundamentally just. In the eyes of the jury the works of Whistler were of such a character that any depreciation of them commercially was of no consequence and ought not to be estimated save at the lowest possible amount. In the same spirit the judge, while giving judgment in favour of Whistler, refused to give him costs. Each side, therefore, had to pay its own costs.

Whistler's suit against Ruskin had become a famous case. The great name of Ruskin in literature, the unexpectedness of a painter and writer bringing their quarrel before a jury, had first of all attracted attention. The report of the proceedings had appeared in all the papers, accompanied by comments, and one could say that the whole public knew of the discussion. Whistler then derived from the affair a great but by no means favourable notoriety for himself and his works. In fact, since he was set on producing without making concessions, and so was in a state of war with public and critics, every stroke which helped to spread his name and make his works better known, far from turning in his favour turned against him.

Pursuing the war, he now had recourse to the pen. As a conclusion to his case he published a pamphlet, *Art and Art Critics*, in which he denied to writers and critics the right they arrogated to themselves of ruling the world of art by giving judgments and uttering condemnations about things of which they had no technical and professional knowledge. The pamphlet, full of spirit, in which Ruskin, Tom Taylor and other writers were neatly put in their places, had some success, and by way of compensation at the very time when people were despising the merits of the painter they were pleased to recognise the spirit of the writer. But the result of all the row over his name was that the public, as

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if his case was settled, came to pronounce upon him one of those verdicts which end by filtering through the lowest strata of society and then remain irrevocable. Burne-Jones in his evidence had uttered the phrase which summarised public opinion: he was an artist who had not fulfilled the promise of his beginning. They agreed then in recognising that he had formerly shown talent, but his talent was, they said, dissipated and lost. When after the end of the Ruskin lawsuit this opinion was generally adopted, Whistler found himself in a terrible situation. He no longer found anybody to buy his pictures, and soon he was seized with money difficulties. The payment of the costs of his lawsuit had become for him a primary source of embarrassment.

At this period he had left the house he formerly inhabited at Cheyne Walk, Chelsea. He was occupying, not far from there, a new house in Tite Street, constructed by the architect Godwin, one of his friends, which was called " The White House." He had decorated the interior in a simple but original way, covering the walls and wainscoting with one of those colour combinations that he loved, this time yellow and blue. The show feature of his furnishing was the collection of blue and white Chinese porcelain which he had got together and set out fantastically on shelves. This porcelain pleased him. He found in it one of those scales of sober and transparent tones towards which he felt himself spontaneously drawn. At this very time, in 1878, he had illustrated the catalogue of the porcelain collection of Sir H. Thompson with reproductions of vases, cups and plates, executed with a fidelity and precision comparable to that of the Dutch masters.[1]

He was accustomed to receive on Sundays his friends and the amateurs of painting who desired to see his works. This kind of reception was a practice then adopted in London by painters of renown, followed above all during the weeks which preceded the sending of their pictures to the annual exhibitions. Whistler

[1] *A Catalogue of Blue and White Nankin Porcelain, forming the Collection of Sir H. Thompson,* by M. Marks. London, Ellis & Elvey, 1878.

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was, in addition, wont to invite to lunch on this day witty and fashionable people. The fare was rather meagre, but the conversation was brilliant. This kind of life had nothing extravagant in it at the time when it was begun. Whistler then sold his pictures easily in a restricted but rich circle, which found his productions original and recognised their merit. Everything appeared to indicate that in the future his resources would increase.

Nevertheless the prosperity which he had enjoyed ceased from the moment he had engaged upon his struggle with the public and critics in wishing to impose his musical nomenclature and make his nocturnes accepted. When opinion was roused against him the works which, in the eyes of certain people, might have had some merit and value now had them no longer, and buyers abandoned them. From that time his establishment became ruinous. For some time he struggled to maintain it with that kind of pugnacity which was his own. But courage and determination could no nothing. He was like a swimmer who, struggling to ascend an irresistible current, far from advancing is carried away by its drift.

Briefly, to put an end to an untenable situation, in 1879 he had to abandon The White House. All that it contained was sold for the benefit of his creditors. His collection of Chinese porcelain, the plates of his etchings, his painter's studies were lost, and the only fortune that remained to him was his talent.

Happily for him, Whistler was capable of splitting himself in two, and at the hour when his painting raised such an opposition that he found it impossible to make it accepted, he was able to turn to etching. The etcher had remained sheltered from the depreciation suffered by the painter. When the nocturnes had ruined the productions of his brush his work with the needle, above all the Thames views, pronounced excellent by common consent, maintained his reputation as a graver. The Fine Art Society of London, a firm that published engravings, came at this

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moment to entrust him with an important commission. It commissioned him to go toVenice and there execute a series of etchings. It would take one dozen at a price of six hundred pounds, and undertook to give him ten shillings for each proof if on his return he wished to print them himself. It also paid the expenses of his voyage in advance.

He arrived in Venice towards the end of September, 1879. He remained there fourteen months, and did not return to London till November, 1880. He brought back fifty etchings, from which the Fine Art Society made its choice of twelve subjects. A hundred proofs of each were drawn and the series sold at fifty guineas. They were shown at the galleries of the Society in Bond Street in December, 1880.

Whistler in Venice found himself in an unknown country. It frequently happens that the artist who works under these conditions transfers to the new ground the character of the surroundings in which he has hitherto lived. So we see by artists successive works which, notwithstanding diversity of locality and of the conditions under which they have been produced, preserve a common family likeness and have the defect of uniformity. Now Whistler had worked for a long time in a country with a very distinct character, England, he had applied a very particular process of execution to his works, and it was a question whether he would be able to rid himself of the English soil and sufficiently modify his practice to bring back from the new country views having a character of their own. The difference between the new etchings of Venice and the old ones of London was so great that an uninitiated judge might easily have attributed them to two different men.

Whistler then had happily triumphed over the danger of not being able to modify himself in the face of new circumstances, but there was another rock to avoid, by the special fact of the work being executed at Venice, that of falling into the groove of one of his great predecessors. Canaletto, both by his painting

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and his etching, and Guardi, by his paintings, have given imperishable images, and the problem of representing Venice without repeating them, which is incumbent upon every artist who wishes to keep original, is one of the most arduous. Now Whistler happily solved this also, having known how to see Venice in his own way.

The series of twelve etchings began with *Little Venice*, the city very low on the horizon, seen from afar across the lagoon. A few horizontal strokes sufficed to indicate the water, and the monuments were simply marked by indented lines. Never had anybody tried to render so much with so little toil apparent, but the success was complete, and one had beneath one's eyes the image that Venice always invokes, that of a city about to sink beneath the sea. As a subject after his own heart he had also done a nocturne, a Venice enveloped in shadows. *The Palaces* gave a view of two semi-Gothic palaces on the Grand Canal, drawn in all the purity of their architecture. *The Riva* represented the Schiavoni quay, with the ships of the port in the distance and numerous figures in the foreground. *The Piazetta* showed a part of the column of St Mark and some neighbouring monuments. Then came occasional views, chosen so as to render the intimate aspect of places. All that was wanting in the series was the double colonnade of the square of St Mark, with the Cathedral at the back, the ducal palace and the Campanile to the side. But Whistler knowingly abstained from this motive which Canaletto and Guardi have treated so often that they have made it their own and have allowed nothing to the wisdom of their successors except to avoid it.

In technique the views showed that faculty of their author of making to recede into the distance the sites which it pleased him to get out of the way, and also the no less important faculty of knowing how to choose the salient part of a subject in such a way as always to present a picturesque image. As for the work of his needle, it was of a wonderful lightness

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and, compared with his previous works, showed a remarkable simplification.

Whistler then had known how to give his rendering of all Venice an individual character, an unexpected aspect, while at the same time he had renewed his methods and his style. The connoisseur then, the man capable of appreciating a thing according to its merit and for the qualities which relate to the form of art to which it belongs, could not fail here to express his praise. Well, never has the work of an artist been received with such unanimity of disparagement, both from the Press and critics. From the smallest to the greatest paper, from London journals to those of the provinces, there was concert in declaring that the new etchings were not as good as the old ones and that the artist had shown himself unworthy of his subject. This was because there was an abyss between Whistler and his critics, because they kept so far away from him it was impossible they should meet. Whistler saw and judged as a painter, the others as men of letters. At this period in England the art critic judged drawings and paintings according to ideas entirely taken from literature. Now every art has its especial æsthetics, its own particular technique, and cannot be properly understood except by the application to it of its own rules. Nevertheless the critics and writers had not the least knowledge how to fulfil this condition in what concerned the pictorial art. They demanded from everybody the same sort of images they obtained from works of the pen. And they could not find this in a Whistler precisely because he, being the most artistic of painters, showed himself the least literary in his field of art.

In addition to these fundamental reasons which hindered critics from appreciating the merit of his Venetian views, there was further the fact that they had an unexpected aspect. Custom reigns everywhere, and Whistler coming out of the beaten path was going to experience once more what it costs to innovate. The new etchings being, in comparison with the old, lighter in handling,

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simplified in line, they were declared inferior as deprived of those qualities of finish that all then agreed in demanding. Consequently they were regarded merely as kinds of sketches or studies. To this condemnation of the method of execution was added another still more grave. The views were, they said, unworthy of the subject; they in no wise rendered that aspect of nobility, beauty and grandeur which Venice ought to have suggested. The critics raised this last reproach under the impression that had been made on them by the Venice of the old painters and of literary people. Whistler here found himself in conflict with his enemy, Ruskin. The latter had written *The Stones of Venice*, in which, with his capacity as a great writer, he had evoked the splendour of the past. This book offered images which presented themselves naturally to the mind when one dreamed of Venice. Especially did they keep before the eyes the magnificence of Tintoretto, with his doge and senators, and of Canaletto and Guardi, with their gentlemen in dominoes and masked ladies.

It was true that nothing of all this appeared in the etchings of Whistler. He had seen the city in the year 1880 and no longer found there either doge or senators. The ancient splendour had vanished. It had been replaced by a sort of venerableness which had spread to all things. Whistler had reproduced this last characteristic of Venice. He, as a faithful observer, had recorded the impoverished aspect of places, always preserving a true distinction, and the decayed nobility and vanished grandeur which he showed were, in their sincerity, worth the pomp and magnificence that had passed away. But, according to the critics and writers with their preconceived notions, his work perpetrated a gross deception; it was held to be inferior, it degraded Venice, it almost insulted her.

Thus the critics were as hard on the last works of the etcher as they had been on those of his brush, the nocturnes; and if they had succeeded as well in ruining the reputation of Whistler as an

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engraver as they had already done as a painter, nothing would have been left him but to leave England and find another country in which to live. Happily for him the collectors of engravings and etchings are different in their habits from the rich people who buy pictures, and while the art critics had driven away the latter, they remained impotent against the former. The amateurs of prints are generally artists or cultivated people with sufficient knowledge to discover the intrinsic merit of works and consequently able to form their own opinion without bothering about the judgment of the Press and of the public. They are also obstinate folk who, when they have once acquired certain works of an artist, wish to possess all the others. Their type is the collector of whom La Bruyère speaks who, having all Callot except one example which he knows to be very inferior, nevertheless laments not being able to possess it. The series of twelve etchings published by the Fine Art Society, although not finding the same immediate sale that might have happened had the criticism been less unfavourable, attracted buyers all the same, and the sales were tolerably satisfactory.

Whistler had himself printed the etchings shown and the perfection of their printing was noticeable. For a long time collectors had known how superior the proofs printed by him were to those taken by anybody else. The Venice set could only confirm the old opinion already formed as to his merit as a printer. The light and simplified work of the point was completed by the atmosphere begot of the printing. In the case of nocturnes and twilight scenes it was to the added work in the printing that the effect was almost entirely due. By his skilful inking of the plate, Whistler knew how to superimpose on the image obtained by the point a general tint recalling aquatint. But one felt how very different to the proofs exhibited would be those drawn by any sort of printer. The collectors who bought the views of Venice wished then to assure themselves that the proofs they obtained would be of equal merit to those they saw,

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and to ensure this they stipulated that these also should be printed by the etcher.

Up to this time Whistler, though he had drawn for himself a good number of proofs of several of his works, had yet only given himself occasionally to the work of printing. But owing to the demands now made, he boldly determined to turn himself into a regular printer. All the series of the Venice set was thus drawn by him or under his immediate direction, and the business of printing formed for years a part of the work of his regular life. One is forced to apply the description of printer to a man who himself produces the proofs of his etchings; it is the usual word and any other is lacking. But the terms "printer" and "printing" only give a very imperfect notion of all that Whistler added to his plates by inking them and drawing his proofs like an artist. It was beyond anything the mere journeyman printer could have obtained in his place. According to the feeling of the moment, at the will of his fancy, he strengthened or diminished the inking of this or that part, thickened or lightened the shadows, suppressed certain details or made others appear. The general impression, while remaining firm and sharp, is full of velvetyness. On occasion to suggest water, to render night, to cast certain parts into shadow, he applied low-toned and transparent tints over large surfaces. The views of Venice drawn by him add, then, to their other qualities, that of never knowing monotony.

Whistler held a second exhibition of his Venetian pieces at the Fine Art Society in February, 1883. There he showed his last prints, hitherto unpublished. To the Venetian etchings he had added a certain number of English pieces, in order to obtain an important group. The public generally does not bother about such special things as etchings, leaving the consideration and examination of them to artists and connoisseurs. But Whistler knew how to find for his exhibition certain incentives to the curiosity which attracts the crowd. First of all the rooms were decorated in accordance with one of his colour arrangements,

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this time in yellow and white, which he knew so well how to combine, and further he had prepared an extraordinary catalogue, destined to make a great sensation. Herein he had complacently inserted every kind of condemnation with which the art critics had endeavoured to overwhelm him. While so many people trembled before any unfavourable judgments that the Press and critics might pass on them, Whistler offered the spectacle of one of the most badly treated men coming to mock at what had been written about him and helping to give it circulation. Under each number in his catalogue appeared quotations taken from a well-known writer or from an influential journal, and all hostile.

First came the pronouncement of *Truth* on the twelve etchings : " Another crop of Mr Whistler's little jokes." Then the opinions of numerous critics about the artist : " Whistler is eminently vulgar."—" Amateur prodige."—" Mr Whistler has etched too much for his reputation."—" Years ago James Whistler was a person of high promise." And then came condemnations passed on the works themselves : " Little to recommend them save the eccentricity of their titles."—" Criticism is powerless here."—" General absence of tone."—" Disastrous failures."[9] People had never seen an artist make fun of his critics to this extent. The catalogue had several editions ; it was bought and carried away for amusement at home. Opinion was definitely favourable to Whistler. Two years had passed since the greater part of the Venice set had been exhibited ; they had made their way, and people knew that connoisseurs had declared themselves satisfied with them, that they had entered into collections as additions to older works admired by general consent. It was inexplicable, therefore, that they could have been so absolutely condemned by professional art critics at their first appearance. For once Whistler had the public on his side against the critics.

Messrs Dowdeswell, of London, published the last views of Venice, which appeared in 1886. The series, limited to thirty impressions, sold at fifty guineas and consisted of twenty-six

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THE MODEL IN REPOSE

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pieces, but only twenty-one were of Venice, the others being English subjects. The perfection of the printing was again presented as a decisive question, the work with the point being, in certain plates, perhaps even lighter than in the preceding set, and Whistler had afresh determined on printing his own proofs as the most satisfactory way of getting them. As a sort of preface to this publication he gave at the beginning a series of "Propositions," in which he established the rules and principles to observe in the art of etching.

## "PROPOSITIONS

"1. That in Art it is criminal to go beyond the means used in its exercise.

"2. That the space to be covered should always be in proper relation to the means used for covering it.

"3. That in etching the means used, or instrument employed, being the finest possible point, the space to be covered should be small in proportion.

"4. That all attempts to overstep the limits insisted upon by such proportion are inartistic thoroughly, and tend to reveal the paucity of the means used, instead of concealing the same, as required by Art in its refinement.

"5. That the huge plate, therefore, is an offence—its undertaking an unbecoming display of determination and ignorance—its accomplishment a triumph of unthinking earnestness and uncontrolled energy—endowments of the 'duffer.'

"6. That the custom of 'Remarque' emanates from the amateur, and reflects his foolish facility beyond the border of his picture, thus testifying to his unscientific sense of its dignity.

"7. That it is odious.

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"8. That, indeed, there should be no margin on the proof to receive such 'Remarque.'

"9. That the habit of margin, again, dates from the outsider, and continues with the collector in his unreasoning connoisseurship—taking curious pleasure in the quantity of paper.

"10. That the picture ending where the frame begins, and, in the case of the etching, the white mount, being inevitably, because of its colour, the frame, the picture thus extends itself irrelevantly through the margin to the mount.

"11. That wit of this kind would leave six inches of raw canvas between the painting and its gold frame, to delight the purchaser with the quality of the cloth."

In accordance with these propositions the last views of Venice not only have no remarques, but have not any margin. Whistler, after the printing, cut the paper all round them to the edge of the engraving.

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## CHAPTER V

## THE YEARS OF STRUGGLE

WHISTLER then stood erect, if one may say so, on the ground of etching; the critics had been unable to persuade collectors that his views of Venice were without value; as a graver he had definitely the advantage. But the fight waged over the field of painting was not equally favourable to him. Whatever he did, he had to remain for years under the blow of the disastrous condemnation that had been passed upon him. The public always saw in him nothing but the eccentric and mystifying painter of nocturnes, the human and living side of his painting was ignored and ceased to be felt. Under these conditions the pursuit of his art became difficult. For pictures of the varied orders that he produced buyers were apt to be wanting, and people felt they ought not to ask him for portraits and so permit him to continue in the way he so specially adhered to.

Nevertheless as there are always exceptions, he found somebody, Mrs Meux, the wife of a rich brewer, who soon after his return from Venice had the courage to commission him to paint her portrait. For at this time, and during several years, it was an act of courage to let oneself be painted by Whistler. In so doing one was not only held to be original or eccentric—and many people are ready to accept a reputation of this kind if it is thrust on them—but one passed for an ignorant person, denuded of any artistic sense, and above all a dupe laying out his money on things of no value. And the care to avoid these last imputations especially is calculated to frighten people away, as Whistler



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perceived in the void created at his studio. Nevertheless Mrs Meux, undisturbed by the opinion of others, ventured to commission a first portrait.

He has represented her standing, in low-cut evening dress, the head and arms bare. The background of the canvas is of that intense black to which he loved to return, and the dress is also black, though a little lighter than the background. But in order to detach the model thus clothed from the background he has thrown round her a long white fur of Thibet sheepskin. In this way the flesh tints and the white fur alone stand out from the prevailing black. Mrs Meux was enchanted with the portrait. It was a rare event that this woman should have been capable of appreciating the art of Whistler when great judges and famous critics only discovered in it material for depreciation. In her satisfaction at being placed on canvas in so distinguished a manner Mrs Meux immediately wished to possess a second portrait. As a contrast to the first, Whistler executed this in very light tones. The model is again standing, wearing a large rose hat and a gown of the same colour. Thus the picture became a *Harmony in Rose and Grey*. Then Mrs Meux had a third portrait painted, which was afterwards destroyed.

After this Lady Archibald Campbell also came to be painted by Whistler. She was a tall woman of great distinction, slim, fair and, in addition, intelligent and of independent spirit. She was an ideal model for a painter. Whistler took advantage of the fact and made several striking portraits of her. He set himself to paint her in unforeseen poses. But over and above the fact that the lady, as a beauty, was capricious, she found herself subjected to bantering and reproaches from her circle in having chosen a painter so decried as Whistler then was. And so, according to whether she was influenced by these outside attacks upon Whistler, or by the reasoning and influence of the latter, she would lend herself to what he undertook or wished to import modifications, or even make him change that which she had first

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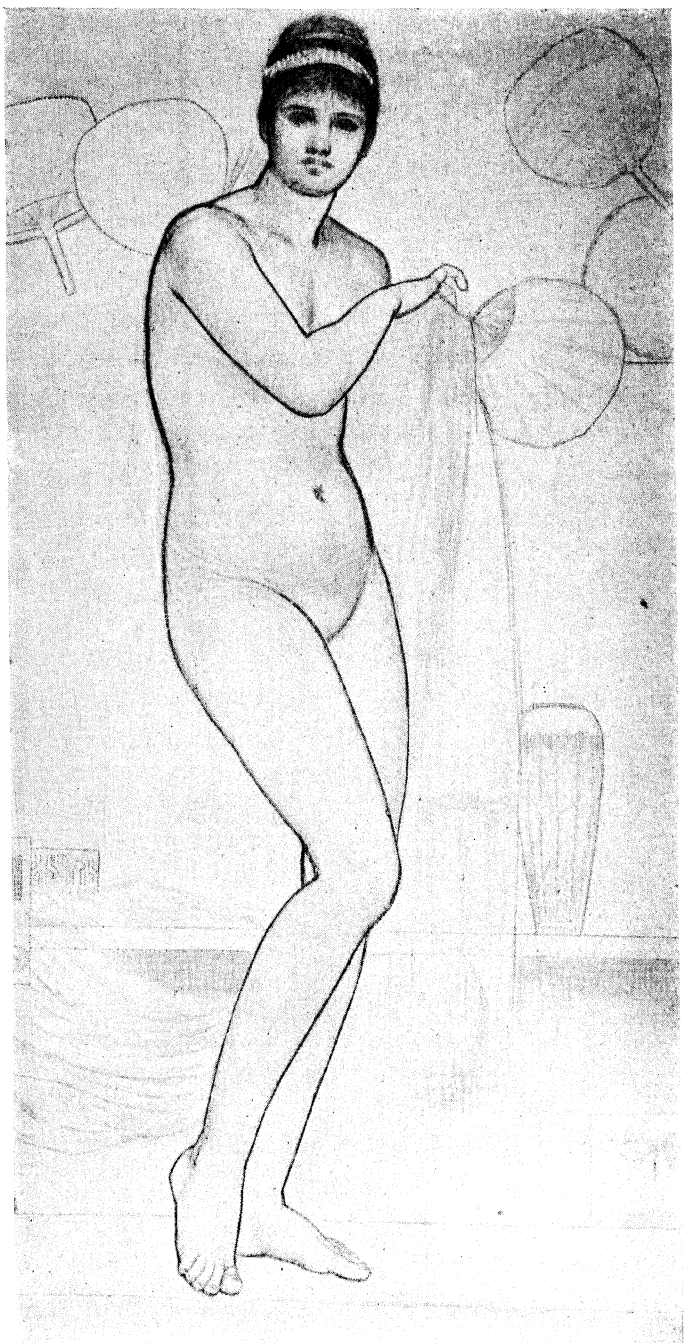

NUDE FIGURE

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of all found to be good. For some time things continued in this way, and Whistler had in train a certain number of canvases, with different poses, without having been able as yet to finish one of them, though one among them had been pushed to a point closely bordering on success.

I do not know exactly what then happened, but someone must have penetrated to Whistler's studio and seen the poses given to Lady Archibald. He must have communicated his unfavourable opinion to the friends and relations of the lady, who thereupon felt so keen a discontent that they must have made remonstrances which were probably violent. At all events it happened that she came to the studio one day in a state of great excitement and demanded that Whistler should change everything in the poses already given, and in particular should begin all over again the portrait that was on the point of being finished. Whistler, who had given way as far as possible to the unreasonable demands of the lady in order that he might succeed in getting a portrait of her finished, was utterly discouraged by this last demand, which would bring all his long toil to naught, without even leaving him the certainty of being able to recommence a new portrait. Things had come to such a pass that the exercise of his art was impracticable. Outside opinion was such that he could no longer find buyers for his pictures, and when, by exception, he secured a courageous woman to pose for him, they raged round her in such a way that she also was induced to turn against him. He felt himself persecuted even in his studio.

It was only with difficulty that he got Lady Archibald to continue to pose, so that the most advanced portrait at least might be finished. The others were abandoned and destroyed. In the portrait brought to a good conclusion the pose certainly has an unusual character, but it is nevertheless quite natural. The lady withdraws herself with an air of disdain, which well accords with her beauty, buttoning her glove and turning her head as if to cast a last glance at the spectator before disappearing.

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We need no information to recognise that the person so painted belongs to the circle of princesses.

The picture was shown at the Grosvenor Gallery in 1884, at the Salon in Paris in 1885, and at Munich in 1888, as the portrait of Lady Archibald Campbell. Then Whistler changed the title and called it *La Dame au brodequin jaune*, after the laced boot of the foot in movement. It is under this title that it figured in the collected exhibition of Whistler's works at Messrs Boussod Valadon in London in 1892, and that it is definitely placed in the Wilstach Collection at Philadelphia.

Mrs Meux and Lady Archibald Campbell were the only persons whose portraits he painted during the first years that followed his return from Venice. No others came to be painted. Not that his name fell into obscurity; on the contrary, the polemics of the Press, his contentions with the critics, his famous catalogue of the second exhibition of his Venetian views, all kept him very much to the front, and he became a man known to all London. But he derived no advantage as a painter from this celebrity. He was considered more and more as a wit, a fighter, a writer, and the painter was disdained more than ever. Under these circumstances he had plenty of leisure in which to execute conceptions of a pictorial order which might occur to him, and I am going to relate how I served him in realising the painting of "evening dress." Moreover, this will permit me to give a glimpse of his manner of planning and executing a work.

One evening in 1883 we were dining together at the house which he then inhabited in Fulham Road, London. During the day we had attended the opening of an exhibition of painting and we passed in review the pictures we had remarked there. He began to criticise particularly the portrait of a president of some society or corporation. This personage was represented bareheaded, his hair separated by a parting on the forehead, and frizzed, and at the same time he was garbed in a red robe of an antique character, the emblem of his office. This combination

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of hair done in the latest fashion and an ancient robe appeared to him to be in detestable taste. Conversation flowed thence to the costume and pose to choose in a portrait. We agreed that the originals ought to be posed variously according to their physique, and that they should be clothed in one of the suits they habitually wore. Now evening dress (*l'habit noir*) was the suit in which gentlemen in England passed a portion of their life; they wore it at dinner, in society, at the theatre, at a ball, and yet nobody was ever painted in it. Was it then so ungraceful, and did it offer such difficulties of execution that painters must systematically avoid it?

The conclusion reached was that one ought to paint "evening dress," and after a moment's reflection he asked me to pose for him. It was understood then that he should paint my portrait in evening dress. It was successively decided that it should be full length, life size, with a light background. He evidently did not trouble himself about difficulties to come, for the full length against a light background was of all poses the most arduous. After that it was necessary to find an arrangement, an accessory, something which should render less gruff the man in black from head to foot. I confess that I had nothing to suggest. Whistler thought it over for some time. Finally, when he had decided, he said to me: "Come on such and such a day; bring your evening dress and a pink domino." I was surprised enough at the domino, but without making any comment I went to seek the object at a costumier's in Covent Garden, and on the appointed day I was in his studio at Tite Street.

He posed me standing in front of a rose-grey hanging, the domino thrown over my left arm, bareheaded, the hat held in the hand of the right arm, which hung down, and he began to attack the portrait without any preliminary drawing. He merely put on the white canvas a few chalk marks to indicate the top of the head and the end of the feet, on right and left, the sides of the body. He placed immediately on the canvas the colours and

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tones, just as they ought to be in the finished picture. At the end of the sitting one could already judge the general appearance that the work would have. It had, as first motive, a man standing, seen full face, in evening dress, and then the domino permitted him to realise that combination of colour of a decorative order that he introduced into every work he painted. The black of the suit, the pink of the domino and the grey of the background formed an *Arrangement in Flesh-colour and Black*. Finally, the domino, falling over the left leg and covering part of it, had allowed him to destroy the ugly parallelism of the two sides of the body and to diversify the contours. This idea of the domino, then, had come to him as a true painter's invention: from a very simple object he had gathered the unexpected arrangement of a picture.

He made me pose for long sittings. He was painting at the same time as my portrait that of Lady Archibald Campbell. He put the two works abreast and I was able to observe the parallel stages through which he made them pass. One of his principal anxieties was to maintain the appearance of things produced without effort. Instead of adding details, he rather suppressed them, and guarded above everything from making them abundant. That his detractors could reproach him for painting pictures that were only sketches was possible not in consequence of any absence of effort on his part, but came from his own conception of what a work of art should be, and was the result, on the contrary, of persistent attention and added labour. We can understand why he should act so when we know the rules of æsthetics which he applied and formulated as a complement to the propositions he had already enunciated about etching.

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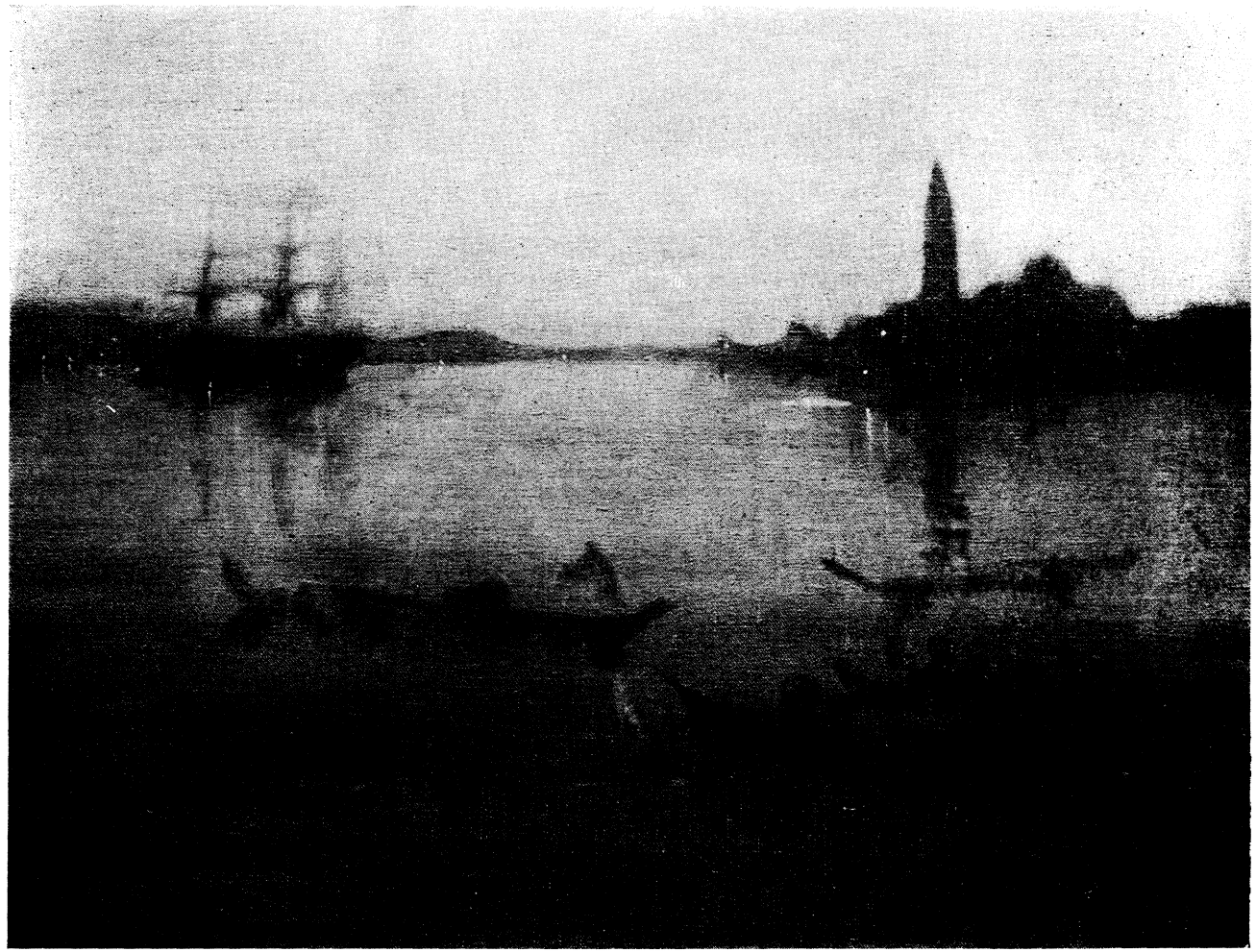

NOCTURNE : VENICE

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"PROPOSITIONS—No. 2

"A Picture is finished when all trace of the means used to bring about the end has disappeared.

"To say of a picture, as is often said in its praise, that it shows great and earnest labour, is to say that it is incomplete and unfit for view.

"Industry in Art is a necessity — not a virtue — and any evidence of the same, in the production, is a blemish, not a quality; a proof, not of achievement, but of absolutely insufficient work, for work alone will efface the footsteps of work.

"The work of the master reeks not of the sweat of the brow—suggests no effort—and is finished from its beginning.

"The completed task of perseverance only has never been begun, and will remain unfinished to eternity—a monument of good will and foolishness.

"'There is one that laboureth, and taketh pains, and maketh haste, and is so much the more behind.'

"The masterpiece should appear as the flower to the painter—perfect in its bud as in its bloom — with no reason to explain its presence—no mission to fulfil—a joy to the artist—a delusion to the philanthropist—a puzzle to the botanist—an accident of sentiment and alliteration to the literary man."

According to these principles he really increased his work, since the finishing of a picture necessitated his taking away, in the last resort, every appearance of effort and of trouble.

Another point in the execution of a painting to which he paid the greatest attention was to maintain the relation of tones between all the parts. For example, in a subject like my portrait, where the arrangement in flesh-colour and black was formed by

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the black suit on one hand and by the pink domino and grey background on the other, as soon as the slightest deviation of tone appeared, whether in the black of the suit or the grey of the background, he put a new layer of colour over the whole picture, so as to bring the least parts of it into the exact relationship which constituted the desired arrangement. Thus he had to repaint perhaps ten times the figure and the background. Reworked upon, after three attacks, this portrait was not finished till several months after it had been commenced. To-day the practised eye easily recognises by its construction that it can only have been brought about by prolonged application, but when it was first shown in the Paris Salon of 1885 it was found, according to the preconception then existing, to have the character of a sketch, and most people thought that its execution had only required a very short time. He had therefore well fulfilled the first rule of his æsthetics, that a painting much worked upon should nevertheless appear as if come at one stroke and without effort. This portrait now has its place in the Metropolitan Museum of New York.

Whistler was really endowed with the temperament of a fighter. And since his painting remained despised he had to persist for many years in his polemics in order to make it accepted, rendering with usury to critics and journalists the blows they wished to put upon him. In this warfare he displayed a real talent as a writer. Thus he attained the singular position, that no painter had probably yet occupied, of a man counted by critics and journalists as a sort of colleague, and towards whom they behaved as if having an affair with a man of letters, disturbed by the ideas he loosed from his pen quite as much as by the works he produced from his brush. His writings showed a combination of American humour with lively flashes let off in the French style, and of logical reasoning with an uninterrupted vein of drollery and banter. Critics, accustomed to see artists trembling before them, found themselves attacked by Whistler, who turned their judgments into ridicule and showed up all their blunders. A

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much-read weekly journal, *The World*, opened its columns to him, and there he engaged in combat. Thus he attracted the attention of the fashionable public, interested in its way in art events and diverted by the thwackings exchanged between critics and artists. He was welcome, therefore, in clubs where men gather to converse and in salons where witty people are sought after. And as he possessed animation and a caustic wit which made him a man as well served by his tongue as by his pen, the union of these two advantages gave him an exceptional notoriety in London society.

Thus his sayings and sallies came to be repeated—often in a contrary sense—and people occupied themselves with what were called his eccentricity and whimsicalness. He had over his forehead a lock of white hair, which detached itself from the midst of his black crop. This lock became celebrated; it served as a motive for caricatures and afforded copy to journalists. His attire never ceased to cause remark. In France, where the "artist's style" permits every fancy in the way of get-up, nobody ever pays any attention to the way in which a painter dresses himself, but in England, where artists are not yet allowed to transgress the common, correct form, Whistler's mixture of the manners of a gentleman with the pose and fantastic get-up of the artist was astonishing, so that when he passed down the street, with his slim long cane and his monocle, the passers-by never failed to look back, and all finished by knowing who he was.

He had begun and continued his battle with the critics and his struggle with the public in order to make his painting accepted in its original form, but if he had not yet gained victory in this enterprise he had at least scored an advantage in another way. Still despised as a painter, he at least gained a reputation as a writer, as a wit, as a "character." Thus he obtained satisfactions of a particular order which gave him some contentment, but deep down his heart was ulcerated with resentment at seeing his art

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despised. This explains the sharpness brought into his scuffles with journalists, artists and critics.

The ambition of the painter was more than ever his dominating passion, and this was perceptible as soon as one saw him in his studio. This being who, encountered at night in drawing-rooms and clubs, might have passed as a mere man of fashion, showed himself by day the workman he had never ceased to be. His studio was austere; canvases turned against the wall, a few chairs, a table and that was all. Once at work he frowned at the mere approach of a Philistine and had only rebuffs for people without artistic judgment. He could only endure very rare friends to frequent his studio. The visitors he had formerly had among critics and writers had either been driven away or had taken themselves off as a result of his attacks against the whole brotherhood of critics, and in the end the only well-known man he received was Oscar Wilde.

The relations between Whistler and Oscar Wilde were preeminently founded in society. At first they had only met at fashionable gatherings. They had been brought together by the simple fact of their being the two men most in repute as original characters. At this period nothing foreshadowed the tragic end of Oscar Wilde. The illustrated papers, above all *Punch* and Du Maurier, had made him famous in making him the type of the æsthete, the refined exquisite full of careless contempt for vulgar life. Wilde accepted the rôle which he played to life before society. By birth, education and ease of manner he was a gentleman, and he possessed a real literary talent, especially as a playwright.

So long as the meetings between Whistler and Oscar Wilde were limited to the fashionable world, their good relations continued. Their success was not of the same kind and the two men could, in clubs and drawing-rooms, remain side by side without offending or making one another too jealous. But when their intimacy became so great that Wilde got in the habit of frequent-

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UPRIGHT: VENICE

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ing Whistler's studio, the rupture could not fail to arrive. Oscar Wilde had no perception of art whatsoever, least of all of painting. I often saw him at this period, and it was a source of astonishment to me that a man raised to the rank of the representative æsthete could be so destitute of artistic judgment. Now it was impossible to preserve intimate relations with Whistler, coming continually to see him in his studio, when one did not know how to speak appreciatively of art in general and of his own in particular. He possessed a keen scent which made him smell out immediately the people to whom his art said nothing or was displeasing, which rendered them to him insupportable. He was gifted with that extreme sensibility of the artist—one cannot compare it better than with that of a cat—which makes its possessor incapable of tolerating people who are felt to be out of sympathy. At the moment, then, when their relations appeared to be established on the best footing, Whistler and Oscar Wilde came to offend one another, to exchange in the Press epigrams and uncivil clawings, till with attacks and recriminations they broke with one another completely.

Whistler resumed his career as a writer with his *Ten O'Clock*. Before being printed the *Ten O'Clock* was delivered orally. Its title was derived from the hour at which the public was invited to hear it. Whistler having found that in London, where people dine very late, the custom of fixing lectures for eight or nine o'clock was inconvenient, had put back his own to ten o'clock. An artist discoursing on art can never hope to attract more than a restricted public, but Whistler enjoyed so great a reputation that he succeeded in bringing an exceedingly brilliant and numerous audience. They knew that when he invited people it was not to let them be bored. Accordingly the body of Prince's Hall, where the lecture was given, was filled with artists, critics, men of letters, who counted on hearing something directed to themselves, and also with men of fashion and ladies of the best society, come in the hope of spending

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an evening that would not be commonplace. Nobody was to be deceived.

The *Ten O'Clock* is made up of aphorisms, exalted pronouncements on art, and at the same time of epigrams and sarcasms in which the enemies of the author are most wittily described and abused. The dogmatic section was heard with astonishment by most of the people who, habituated to occupy themselves with the supposed eccentricities of Whistler, no longer knew what serious ideas he could nourish on his art; but then his epigrams and caustic descriptions gave them real enjoyment. All his targets, the critics, the journalists, the æsthetes, were there present, and as Whistler came to deal with them in his allusions the audience who saw them found them so well hit off that it manifested its delight by bursts of laughter, and its appreciation of the orator's talent by prolonged applause. From his evening at Prince's Hall, therefore, Whistler extracted the full success that he may have promised himself.

The *Ten O'Clock* was given in London on 20th February 1885. It was repeated at the two universities, at Cambridge on 24th March, at Oxford on 30th April. Whistler waited long enough without publishing it, and it was not till 1888 that he had it printed. Orally delivered, the *Ten O'Clock* had already excited widespread notice in the Press, and in its printed form it aroused fresh and still more numerous comments. The critics generally condemned its ideas, and to crown it all Swinburne, entering the lists, claimed to refute him in *The Fortnightly Review* for June, 1888. Swinburne, who formerly at Cheyne Walk had been the friend of Whistler and a visitor at his studio, turned completely against him. Like others, he judged art works by literary considerations and struck him also on his side. Whistler, indignant that a poet should mix himself up with the writers of every kind who pursued him, replied publicly to Swinburne, reproaching him with quitting his lyre to expose in a vulgar article his ignorance of art matters. This polemic put an end to their relations.

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The " Society of British Artists " was an old London society which, after prosperous days, had fallen into decline. It had its exhibition galleries up a blind alley, Suffolk Street. This site was just beside the exhibitions of the Royal Academy when they were held in Trafalgar Square, in a part of the building now entirely occupied by the National Gallery. But when the Royal Academy, abandoning its old home, came to occupy in Piccadilly the building specially constructed for it, Burlington House, the " Society of British Artists " remained far from this artistic current and visitors began to fail. The opening of the Grosvenor Gallery, still farther away in Bond Street, came to it as a fresh blow. The exhibitions of the Society of British Artists had been, as it were, an annexe to those of the Royal Academy, where one could see the artists rejected from the official sanctuary. But the part of the annexe had now been seized by the younger and better-placed Grosvenor Gallery. Thus the Society of British Artists remained forlorn and felt its life ebbing away.

It began then to seek out fresh elements to attract and it judged that the best thing to do would be to recruit some artist with a resounding name. Whistler best fulfilled the conditions. Just as the Grosvenor Gallery on its opening had been seized with the thought that he would help to excite public curiosity, so the Society of British Artists thought of him in turn to obtain from him the same advantage. Consequently he received an invitation from the society to exhibit in its galleries; they would accept works left to his choice and give them the best place.

Since his return from Venice Whistler had continued to exhibit at the Grosvenor Gallery. In 1881 he had sent there his portrait of Miss Alexander, and in 1884 that of Lady Archibald Campbell; but the proposals of the Society of British Artists seemed to him so advantageous that he believed he ought to accept them. Forsaking Bond Street and the Grosvenor Gallery, he showed his work henceforward at Suffolk Street. The Society of British Artists had two exhibitions annually, one in winter and one in

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summer. Whistler made his first appearance there in the winter of 1884 with his *Portrait of Mrs Louis Huth*, painted in 1877. To the summer exhibition of 1885 he sent a series of water-colours and, dominating everything, the full-length portrait of the violinist Sarasate, recently painted.

It was the second time he had painted a man in evening dress, and according to his custom of never repeating a motive he had already painted, or, if he did so, finding another combination of colours or different accessories, his first evening-dress portrait having had a light background, his second had to have a dark one. The *Portrait of Sarasate*, with its arrangement all in black and its sensitive aerial envelope, resembles a nocturne. Now, as the nocturnes remained always in especial disgrace, it is not astonishing that this work was much discussed, admired by the elect and the younger artists, misunderstood and depreciated by the crowd. Whistler had happily realised what he sought for in this work. Sarasate upright, his violin in his hand, gives well the idea of inspired virtuoso. The portrait now hangs in the Museum of Pittsburg, U.S.A.

The Society of British Artists saw itself reanimated by Whistler. Thanks to his presence, it had obtained from Press and public an attention to which it was not accustomed. It resolved now to take a further step, to place him at its head so as to reap all the possible fruits of his celebrity. Thus in June, '86, he was elected President. Thenceforward, while continuing to exhibit numerous works of different kinds, he sought to renovate the old organism by introducing certain reforms. In the winter of '85 he showed the *Portrait of Mme Cassatt, Arrangement in Black, No. 8*; in '86 the *Portrait of Lady Colin Campbell, Harmony in Ivory-white*; in 1887 the *Portrait of Mrs Walter Sickert, Arrangement in Violet and Rose*. At the same time he gained several new members, chosen from artists known in London and abroad. He obtained a charter which permitted the society to call itself "Royal." In 1887 the exhibition arranged by him presented an

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NOCTURNE: PALACE, VENICE

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unexpected appearance. To the habitual accumulation of works without merit succeeded a restricted choice where the productions of new-comers of talent predominated. The rooms, hitherto sombre, had been decorated with a combination of clear and gay colours.

But these innovations so offended the interests of the neglected members, they so deeply displeased the old ones, attached to the traditional ways, that they aroused a violent opposition.

At a new election in June, '88, Whistler and his partisans found themselves in a minority, and a routine artist, Mr Bayliss, was elected president. Immediately there was a reaction against the reforms introduced; Whistler and the artists brought in by him retired, after which the old society, having become like its former self, again took up its somnolent existence.

In the year 1888, where we have arrived, Whistler as a painter remained generally misunderstood. At the first glance the state of public opinion about him did not appear to have changed in any way. Nevertheless in truth he had gained ground. The artists of the new generation savoured his originality. Among many of them one could recognise reflections of his manner, or even direct borrowings made from his methods. The public, if its judgment remained always unfavourable, calmed down since it saw no more new works of the kind which had first exasperated it. In fact Whistler, notwithstanding his combative spirit, flinched on the point of nocturnes. He produced no more. A subterranean change of opinion was working in his favour. One could thus give the years 1883-1884 as those in which Whistler reached his nadir in England, and after this a movement in the contrary direction began to make itself felt. A final incident, marking the still existing hostility, occurred at the sale of the Graham Collection at Christie's in April, 1886. The collection included a nocturne, and one of the most important, *Old Battersea Bridge*, now at the Tate Gallery in London. When it was put up for sale it was hissed by the company present.

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It became evident that the fight was drawing to a close and that Whistler felt that the most agitated period of his life had reached its end, when he saw fit to publish the collection of his writings, pamphlets and epigrams. Long ago his friends had advised him to collect them. He finally decided to publish to escape the danger of seeing them issued by another. He had commissioned an American, Mr Sheridan Ford, to search out the communications of all kinds he had sent during years past to the Press. When this last had finished his task Whistler and he could not agree on what remuneration he deserved and on the use to be made of the collected documents. Mr Ford, in possession of the texts, resolved to publish them himself. He succeeded in producing a volume in the United States, of which some copies which existed may have been distributed before the seizure of the edition provoked by Whistler. Mr Ford next vainly tried to launch his volume surreptitiously in Belgium and in Paris. It was again stopped and seized. But Whistler understood that the only way of effectually stopping publication by another was to do it himself.

The authorised volume of his writings appeared in London, from Mr William Heinemann, in 1890, under the title of *The Gentle Art of Making Enemies*. Here were collected a report of his case against Ruskin, the pamphlet which followed on *Art and Art Critics*, the catalogue of the second exhibition of his Venice etchings, with the hostile judgments of the critics, the *Ten O'Clock*, his propositions on æsthetics, and finally the series of his controversies, contentions, attacks and replies, to which incidents in his years of combat had given rise. The book thus presents a complete image of the man. He allows himself to be seen just as he was, joining sureness of vision and right judgment to the most astonishing vein of humour and bantering.

After having first signed works with his name, Whistler had adopted a butterfly as his mark. He extended the use of this sort of monogram to his letters and writings and made general use of it. The butterfly changed its appearance with the years, and

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finished by being placed in various poses on a supporting leaf. From the beginning he had clothed it in a form which would have obliged an entomologist to create after him a special genus, and he was led to characterise it more and more. In the volume which contains his writings Whistler has introduced it as a signature in the course of pages so as to make of it definitely a strange insect. In each case it seems imbued with the spirit proper to the writing at the bottom of which it figures. In the case of pamphlets, epigrams, attacks, the gentle butterfly of the fields is turned into a beast of prey, convulsing itself in aggressive attitudes and disclosing a long tail terminated by a threatening sting.

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## CHAPTER VI

## LITHOGRAPHS AND PASTELS

WHISTLER began to take up lithography rather late in life. His first works in this medium only date from 1878-1879. As a beginning he produced several works drawn directly on the stone, among them being the *Nocturne* and *Limehouse*, afterwards included in the series of six impressions published in 1887 by Messrs Boussod Valadon at London under the general title of *Notes*. For a good long time after that Whistler forsook lithography. This was during the years he was in Venice and when, after his return, he was absorbed in the printing of his etchings. He returned to lithography in 1887-1888, never again to abandon it. At this time the process of transferring to stone a drawing first made on paper had been perfected, and had become reliable in practice. Henceforward Whistler only drew on the paper, and this permitted him to work under conditions which would have been impracticable if he had had to bring a stone with him. He could render all sorts of motives, found by chance, which have the charm of those things seized on the instant. Thus his lithographic work has remained exceedingly varied and suggests neither toil nor research in the studio. They consist of simple studies, real sketches; in their most advanced states they show varied views, women's figures—nude, lightly draped, or dressed in the fashion of the day—and men's portraits. In an art where the virtue of the printing plays so large a part, Whistler had the good fortune to meet in London a skilful lithographic printer, Thomas Way, who was able to take perfect impressions of his works.



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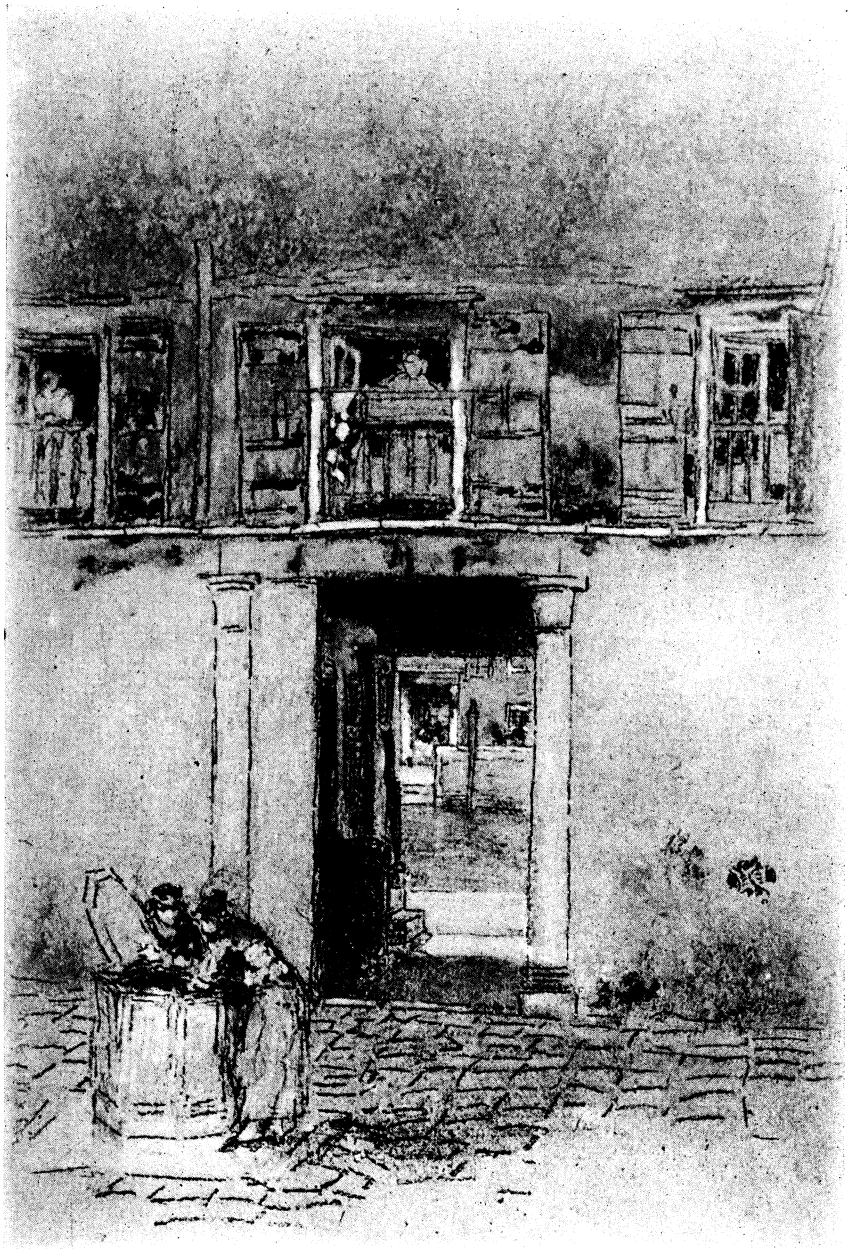

Porch, Venice

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The lithographs may be classified according to the locale of their production. During the years he lived in Paris, notably in 1893-1894, we have a series of motives and subjects taken in Paris: *The Long Gallery of the Louvre, The Garden of the Luxembourg, The Locksmith of the Place du Dragon, The Rue de Furstenberg. Confidences in the Garden*, two women standing and talking, was seized in the garden of his own house in the Rue du Bac.

The views of London and numerous other English subjects were done at different times. In 1895 he spent a holiday at Lyme Regis, a seaside resort in Dorsetshire. There in addition to a series of most original lithographs he executed two heads in oils, one of a man, *The Master Smith*, the other of a young girl, *Little Rose of Lyme Regis*. Both paintings are now in the Boston Museum.

In 1896, his wife having fallen ill, he came with her to stay at the Savoy Hotel in London, which from the level of the Strand looks over the Thames. There the invalid found fresh air and the artist rejoiced in the magnificent vistas of the river. He profited by the occasion to obtain one of his most successful lithographs. The *Little London* shows the left bank of the Thames, the quay-side, St Paul's Cathedral and bridges in the distance. *The Pigeons of the Savoy* also gives the left bank of the Thames, but no longer looking down but up the river, with the towers of the Houses of Parliament in the distance. He has also taken from the Savoy another view of the greatest interest; the river is seen from above in all its breadth, its barges nearly level with the water, the buildings on the farther bank closing the horizon. A sort of steam, a twilight mist of wonderful limpidity, envelops the whole scene. In this he attains a rare technical success.

Whistler made a certain number of lithographs of the nude or of women lightly draped. The model having posed naturally for works of this kind, they possess the savour of reality given by the reproduction of the human form as seen; but at the same time they present traces of resemblance to Pompeian figurines and still

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more so to Greek terracottas. Among these delicate productions we may note *The Little Model Reading*, a young girl seated, her legs crossed, seen in profile, reading a book she is holding in her hand. Although the artist has sought here simply to render the charm he felt, the comparison with the Greek figurines, for suppleness and elegance of form, springs at once to the mind.

In addition to the draped figures which his fancy prompted, Whistler did women in ordinary dress, one may even say in fashionable attire. Under more or less fantastic titles, which have served to distinguish them, these were real portraits, easily recognisable by those who knew the originals. The prints entitled *The Siesta*, *On the Balcony*, were done from his wife in 1896 at the Savoy Hotel; *Needlework* is a portrait of his sister-in-law, Miss Rosalind Birnie Philip, whom he made his heiress and the executrix of his will. There also exist by him portraits of the painter Walter Sickert, originally his pupil, of the poet Henley, of Thomas Way, the printer of the lithographs. The print known as *The Doctor* represents his brother William, who practised medicine in London.

The portrait of Stéphane Mallarmé has been placed as frontispiece at the beginning of the volume, *Vers et Prose*, par Stéphane Mallarmé, chez Perrin, Paris, 1893. Mallarmé is astoundingly lifelike, the arm in movement, the head thrown forward, according to his wont when conversing with his friends. Those who have known him can believe they hear him speak. Nevertheless the image only exists as a breath. It is built up by the most rapid pencil strokes. It is an improvisation, and yet one does not improvise so striking a rendering of a human being; it is necessary to have penetrated him profoundly to give him with this intensity of life and character. But this little figure, while coming as an improvisation, is none the less due to close and prolonged work. Whistler had kept Mallarmé posing a pretty long time. He drew rapidly, as the idea of the light sketch he wished to make dictated, but the first likenesses thus obtained, before he had thoroughly penetrated his model, seemed to him feeble, and he tore them up

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to begin all over again. Mallarmé, who did not understand this method very well, had almost despaired of a success, when Whistler, at the desired moment, produced a final improvisation, perfect at last and a condensation of all the observation accumulated in the course of his preliminary attempts.

Mallarmé and Whistler were good friends. Drawn together by their common fund of refinement and delicacy, they were nevertheless totally different, both in character and turn of mind; just as the one was peaceable, given to indulgence, so was the other over-excitable and bellicose. Mallarmé translated the *Ten O'Clock* into French.

Whistler has also made lithographic portraits of his friends and compatriots, Mr and Mrs Joseph Pennell, who have been among those in London who best know how to appreciate and defend him, and have written an exhaustive book in which he is shown under his manifold aspects.[1]

The lithographs appeared in various ways at different times. Sometimes Whistler gave them to journals. In 1890 there burst upon London *The Whirlwind*, edited by two young men who claimed that they were going to revive the cause of the Stuarts. There exists, in Bavaria I believe, a prince descended from the Stuarts, whom a few obstinate people have persisted in regarding as the legitimate heir to the throne of England. The editors of *The Whirlwind* belonged to this section, and they proposed to draw attention to their king. To this singular enterprise they had added another—almost as desperate—to make known and comprehensible to their readers the works of Mallarmé and the decadent French poets. Finally, in the third place, they thought of recommending the art of Whistler. They sought him out, and as he always liked people out of the common ruck, he gave them some of his lithographs to put in their journal.

[1] *The Life of James McNeill Whistler*, by E. A. and J. Pennell. London, William Heinemann, 1908. New and revised edition, 1911. French translation, Paris Hachette, 1913.

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*The Whirlwind* offered, then, for a penny, a plea in favour of the Stuarts, a poem by Mallarmé and a lithograph by Whistler. Notwithstanding all this it could not live, and disappeared. Other times, other manners. These lithographs, neglected when they were at hand, are only found to-day with difficulty; they are sought after and bought with gold.

About the same time appeared a new periodical, *The Albemarle*, of which the first number contained a lithograph by Whistler. The whole number sold for sixpence.

Mr Thomas R. Way issued at London in 1896 a catalogue of the lithographs, in which one hundred and thirty pieces are described [1]; in a second edition of the catalogue, published in 1905, after the death of Whistler, the number of lithographs is extended to one hundred and sixty.

Whistler used pastel in an individual way, not in the execution of portraits, the use to which it has been most put in France, but to produce slight figure studies, chiefly of women, and renderings of views or rather urban sketches. The figure subjects came at different times. They generally present, when they are not nude studies, women in light or transparent draperies. They possess a kind of elegance which make us think of Tanagra figurines. It is the same feeling as that given by the lithographs of analogous subjects. In these pastels the colour, sparingly used, does not cover the paper, which is often grey, except in parts, and is combined with the lines or contours drawn in pencil.

It was at Venice above all that Whistler used pastel to render open-air views and scenes. The first exhibition of views of Venice at the Fine Art Society, London, in December, 1880, showed fifty-three pastels after the etchings. In the catalogue Whistler resorted freely to his habitual nomenclature. The works bore titles like *Harmony in Blue and Brown, Note in Flesh-colour, in*

[1] London, George Bell & Son. Mr Way has also written in collaboration with Mr G. R. Dennis a volume on the art of Whistler: *The Art of James McNeill Whistler: An Appreciation.* London, Geo. Bell & Son, 1905. Illustrated.

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CANAL, VENICE

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*Opal, in Turquoise*, which was not precisely the way to gain him the favour of the Press and the critics.

Whistler also knew how to use water-colour. He applied it to the most diverse subjects; for example, the rendering of the figure. (We give an example of this in the portrait of Nelly Finch that we reproduce.) Nevertheless he made use of it chiefly for slight sketches of views.

WHISTLER DELIVERING THE "TEN O'CLOCK"
By CHARLES KEENE (page 97)
[*Reproduced by permission of the Proprietors of "Punch"*

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## CHAPTER VII

## SUCCESS

For success as a painter Whistler might have had to wait during many more long years in England if, to obtain it, he had had to count on a favourable change of opinion producing itself spontaneously without external aid. Happily he had a footing elsewhere and lived with France in a community of spirit which was to allow him to receive her brilliant tokens of admiration. It was the success first obtained in France which, acting as a counter-blow in England, facilitated the movement operating there in his favour and brought about the collapse of a resistance deemed insurmountable. To understand the difficulty, if not the impossibility, Whistler would have still experienced for a long time in England to make himself appreciated, we must take into account the existence there of painters universally admired, producing according to the same inveterate æsthetic, and see what place Whistler and his art occupied in relation to them.

Three painters then held the first place in England—Leighton, Millais and Burne-Jones. Frederick Leighton was a very fine-looking man, one can even say a man with a magnificent presence, who as he mounted the social ladder seemed only to obtain his due. He had attained the highest position open to his profession, that of President of the Royal Academy; he had been honoured with the dignity of a knighthood, the highest distinction hitherto conferred on any painter in England, including Reynolds, and then he had been promoted to the peerage and made Lord Leighton. He was a brilliant speaker, and his orations at the



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banquets of the Royal Academy, over which he presided, always drew the applause of the guests. He had built for him a house which added to his renown, that was visited for curiosity. It was on the model of a dwelling in Damascus, with walls covered with tiles and a fountain in the central hall. He possessed then varied advantages which explain his elevation. In addition, he was a polished man of the world, with easy and agreeable manners. Amid all this brilliance there existed a shadow that Whistler was wont to reveal by saying, after he had complacently enumerated the titles and faculties of the man: "And he paints into the bargain." That was the truth. Painting with Leighton had lost all strength. In his youth his art, borrowed from Italian memories and attaching itself to the classic tradition, had sufficed to distinguish him, but far from developing and taking on power and breadth, it gradually faded to a degree that in the end it was no longer the merit of the artist which sustained the reputation of the man, but the eminence attained by the man which bluffed the public into still admiring the artist.

Of all the artists enjoying popular favour Millais was the most gifted and most powerful. At his start he had made one of the Pre-Raphaelite group, and had there shown himself to have an individuality. At this period he painted his most original compositions, *The Huguenot*, *Autumn Leaves*, *The Grave Diggers*, etc., groups of people or scenes rendered with a certain tightness, but possessing life and emotion. These works, which were definitely to form the best part of his production, were at first—as always happens—badly received because of their very originality. He had therefore renounced the tight and characteristic manner of his early style to paint in a less exceptional way. He put himself in harmony with the general taste and thus obtained popular favour to a greater and greater extent. At the finish, owing to his great renown, he saw rich clients coming to him and asking him to paint their portraits, most often without any research, and among these it was only exceptionally that passages here

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and there occurred recalling the power and originality of his past works. He even painted figures of little girls pouting or playing the coquette—explicable by the fact that they were generally intended to be reproduced at Christmas as colour-plates by illustrated papers. One of them, *Cherry Ripe*, a little girl with a cherry in her hand, published by *The Graphic*, obtained an enormous success and sold to the extent of something like five hundred thousand. Millais, having thus adapted himself to the public taste, was able to see his renown increase up to his last days, and he received, like Leighton, exceptional honours, which hitherto had not been accorded to any English painter. He was made a baronet.

At the beginning Burne-Jones, as heir of the Pre-Raphaelites, had taken up the position of a dissenter. Nevertheless, after having at first received only the praises of the æsthetes and the Pre-Raphaelite adherents, he won over the larger public, and more and more conquered the writers and critics. Based, as it was in fact, on literature and the revival of ancient forms, his art was of a character towards which men of letters are naturally drawn. Burne-Jones altogether lost his first attitude of dissent and ended up by having no more adversaries. The Royal Academy elected him Associate by a unanimous vote, in itself an acclamation, and after this he also was created a baronet. From the moment he acquired this double consecration he passed to a state of being which was above all debate and all criticism.

Elevated to aristocratic rank, these artists, with their great renown and their popularity, were stars of the first magnitude in the world of art, on whom the others modelled themselves and around whom they circled. Thus was formed a formidable combination by a body of painters who had presented and made accepted by the critics, the world of fashion, the whole people, a system of æsthetics outside of which it was inconceivable that there could be anything of value. Now this system can be summed up in two sentences: firstly, a picture ought to be able

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MOTHER AND CHILD

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to speak to the spectator and interest him by showing him ascertainable compositions, people in action, expressive scenes; secondly, a picture ought to be finished, pushed to a high degree of precision and present sharply defined lines and contours. These rules had been all the more readily accepted by critics and the public inasmuch as they corresponded to their natural dispositions, the public really only interesting itself in art because of the anecdote to be disengaged from it, and the writers having at heart the same tendency, which permits them to find themselves in painting again on their own territory.

But with these ideas what becomes of the essential qualities to be sought out as precious above everything, the intrinsic merit of the painted surface, the value in itself of the colour scheme, the beauty of drawing and of brushwork apart from the subject represented? These decisive points were as if forgotten in England at this time. And so the artists, thought to be so great according to the prevailing æsthetics, were in truth only idols with feet of clay. Not one of them could be compared with the real masters, their predecessors, imbued with the English character, Hogarth, Reynolds and Gainsborough.

Nobody went so far back in his judgments; rooted to the narrow platform of the actual, they found excellent whatever came from those they no longer discussed. The reigning standards appeared the only admissible, and all that differed was despised. Now, as Whistler showed himself to be an absolute rebel against the reigning standards, so he could not fail to be spat upon and damned. For his part, he declared that it was the decorative quality, the beauty of substance, the breadth of handling which, above all, constituted the merits of a work, and that when these elements were lacking all the rest became indifferent. His conduct conforming to his precepts, he accordingly sought out in his paintings those arrangements of colour and tonal harmonies about which the others gave themselves no trouble, and keeping to the direct representation of nature, he neglected those literary subjects,

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historical or legendary motives which had the pretension of being specially interesting to the spectator.

Under these conditions his pictures were bound to wear a very different face to that presented by the works of others, and as these others were for the whole people the real masters, Whistler beside them was only a would-be artist, a hoaxer, a man stuck fast in the wrong path. To put him in the same rank with the others seemed impossible. The critic of *The Times*, in his review of the exhibition at the Grosvenor Gallery in 1882, stated it formally when concerning his contributions he wrote :

"Before the full-length portraits by Mr Whistler, criticism and admiration appear equally impossible, and the mind hesitates between the feeling that the artist is mocking the spectator or that the painter is suffering from some optical delusion. After all, there are certain accepted canons about what constitutes good drawing, good colour and good painting; and when an artist deliberately sets himself to ignore or violate all of these, it is desirable that his work should not be classed with that of ordinary artists."

There existed then a gulf, as it were, between the famous artists of the Royal Academy and Whistler; they were on one side, he was on the other. Thus he was a real "outsider." If this position had been made for him by the artists and critics who had become his enemies, it must be admitted that he had not sought to avoid it. One may even say that he acted in such a way that he himself helped to dig the ditch, and that with his combative spirit, returning blow for blow, he amused himself by endorsing the established separation. As the number and quality of his enemies were nothing to be frightened about, here is the way in which in 1886 he dealt in *Truth* with the whole of the Royal Academy and consequently with the whole body of painters approved by critics and admired by the public :

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"What you call English Art is not Art at all, but produce, of which there is, and always has been, and always will be, a plenty, whether the men producing it are dead and called ——, or (I refer you to your own selection, far be it from me to choose) —or alive and called —— whomsoever you like as you turn over the Academy catalogue. The great truth, you have to understand, is that it matters not at all whom you prefer in this long list. They all belong to the excellent army of mediocrity; the difference between them being infinitely small—merely microscopic—as compared to the vast distance between any one of them and the Great. They are the commercial travellers of Art, whose works are their wares, and whose exchange is the Academy."

Similar attacks in a widely circulated journal, without mentioning the epigrams he let fly in other ways, were not calculated to bring back to him those who had first condemned him and wished to keep him outside. But if he showed himself so pitiless in his judgments on the painters around him who had become his enemies, it was not because he was incapable of admiration. He extolled, under all circumstances, Velasquez and Tintoretto, of whom he made gods. He praised Hogarth and regarded him as without a peer among the early English masters. He also knew how to praise certain living artists in England with whom he had friendly relations. They were men who, engaged, like him, on work out of the beaten track, saw themselves more or less despised, and it was natural that he should take their part. Artists of this kind, his friends, were Albert Moore, Carlo Pellegrini and Charles Keene.

Albert Moore, a delicate artist, made his great appeal by his charm. More than any other painter in England he followed the same standards as Whistler. Like him, he disdained the literary, anecdotal or historic side of painting, and the merit of his works consisted above all in his colour harmony and arrangements of line. He painted draped women, committed to no particular

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action and in attitudes calculated simply to give full value to the folds of the stuffs and to beauties of contour. Without going to the point of classic form, his arrangements exhaled a sort of reminiscence of the antique. They remained original by the unexpectedness of the poses, by the introduction of arabesques and accessories peculiar to the author.

From the very fact of being exempt from the ruling æsthetic, Albert Moore found himself isolated. He showed his works at the Royal Academy, where they were accepted ; beyond this, as they presented no motive thought interesting and as their delicate merit escaped notice, they were generally passed unseen or appeared to be of an inferior order. Moore had given evidence in favour of Whistler in the course of the Ruskin lawsuit, and had expressed in warm terms his appreciation of the nocturnes so attacked. This was not calculated to make the critics and the Academy favourable to him, any more than the circumstance that Whistler had dedicated to him his pamphlet on *Art and Art Critics*, which he published at the end of the case. Albert Moore, always weak in health, died at the age of fifty-two, ignored by the general public, appreciated only by a few connoisseurs and rejected by the Royal Academy, which, preferring men without talent, had desired him neither as member nor associate.

Carlo Pellegrini, a Neapolitan transplanted to England, had attempted painting without any great success. The paintings he sent to some exhibitions at the Grosvenor Gallery had revealed nothing in particular. To compensate this he had known how to open out another path in which he was to show himself quite a master. This was not that of caricature, as is most often said when speaking about him, but of what we will call the exaggerated portrait. The caricaturist generally gives the same character to all his figures, while Pellegrini knew how to preserve the likeness of each being and his individual bearing, pushing them to their supreme expression. As many portraits as he did, so many distinct types he produced.

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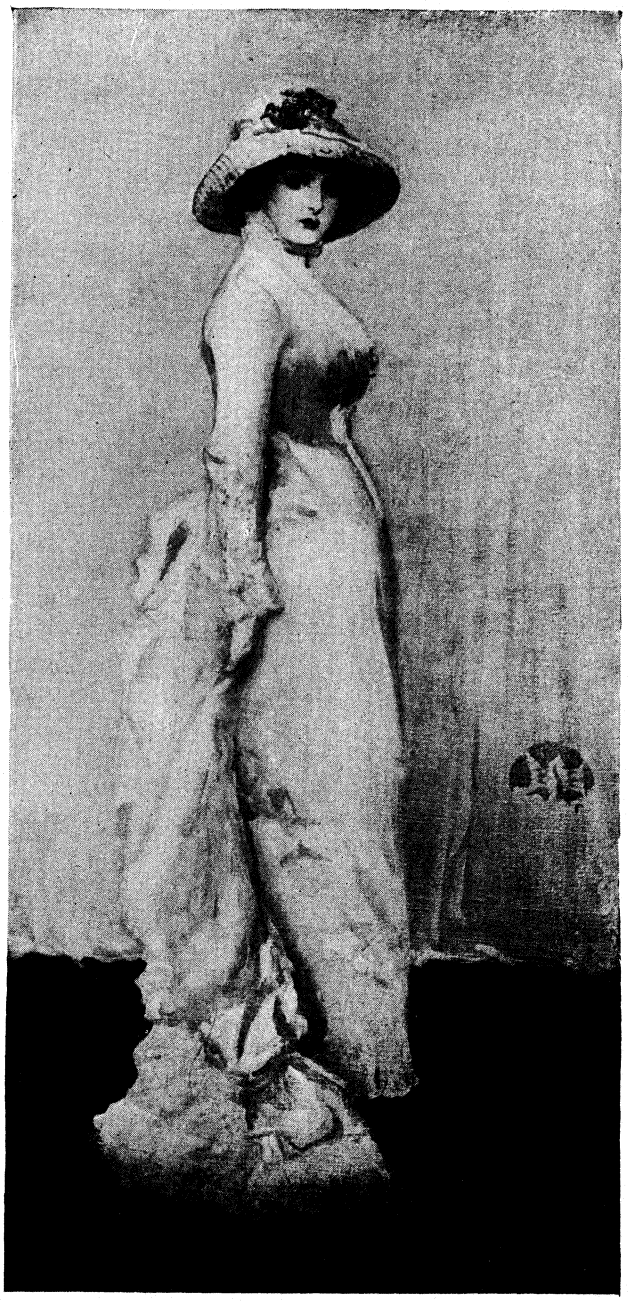

PORTRAIT OF LADY MEUX

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These portraits, regarded all the same as caricatures, published as supplements to the weekly journal, *Vanity Fair*, in the form of lithographs, and signed with the fantastic pseudonym of "Ape," were never considered by the public or the critics as great works of art. But Whistler was greatly taken with them and showed for their author, with whom he was friendly, a quite special esteem. One of the points of his æsthetic was that the dimensions and kind of material of a work were of no importance, that very small works, etchings, terracottas like those of Tanagra, a fan painted by Hokusai, might be works of great art, while oil-paintings of historical subjects, as much worked upon as possible, coming from men who were very famous but lacking the true gifts of the artist, were nothing but "produce" and "merchandise."

Pellegrini could not make his models sit to him. To discover their various manners and seize in each case their individuality, he was obliged to seek them in the places where they revealed themselves most, in the street, at the club, or in Parliament. After having observed them he kept them and turned them over in his memory for some time before he set them down on paper. This practice demanded an intense application of mind. He was consumptive by nature and the inclemency of the English climate, coupled with the fatigue of his work, brought about his death in 1889 at the age of fifty.

*Vanity Fair* issued weekly one of these "loaded-portraits" of celebrities in the public eye, and gave in 1878 one of Whistler. It was assigned to Leslie Ward, who was employed there concurrently with Pellegrini. Ward signed as "Spy." The portrait he made of Whistler, under the title of *A Symphony*, is very life-like. It well suggests the appearance of the original when it pleased him to walk about town in one of those costumes in which the gentleman and the artist were curiously mixed. Whistler posed for this portrait. Ward, having come to his studio, made a drawing from life, and made his lithograph from this. The head ought originally to have been covered with the

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top hat that Whistler usually wore, but Ward having accidentally sat upon it and flattened it, it was replaced by a kind of bolero headgear which was at hand and occasionally used by Whistler.

Charles Keene, whose talent Whistler particularly admired, formed an absolute contrast to those academic painters ennobled and loaded with favours. He lived unknown to the public, without receiving honours or distinctions of any sort, at the most esteemed at his right value by a few artists. For the rest, he showed himself indifferent to all that is called popularity, glory or recompense. He resembled those ancient artists who built cathedrals or left engravings without troubling to come out of their obscurity. For thirty years he contributed to *Punch*, the comic journal seen by all England, drawings which he only signed with his initials, a C and a K interlaced, with the result that the public was always ignorant of his name and personality. He rendered with humour and in an original but exceedingly faithful manner the world of the middle and lower classes; thus his art applied itself to familiar scenes and types that were before all eyes, and were then held to be so ordinary that his representations were disdained as if they came of themselves.

When one turns over to-day the leaves of the old numbers of *Punch*, from the moment when Leech died it is the drawings of Keene which alone remain arresting as simple and powerful things. The complicated productions of others, suggested by motives of ephemeral interest, after having monopolised attention in their time, are now almost incomprehensible, possessing only a secondary importance, and remain without interest. Keene in his youth had learnt to engrave on wood. When he came to discover his talent as a creative artist, knowing the technique of wood-engraving, he adapted his work to it and drew directly on the wood. In this way his drawings for *Punch*, in addition to their intrinsic merit as drawings, possess the additional virtue of being, when reproduced, woodcuts of the first quality.

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Keene was the simplest man in the world; his art absorbed him entirely and in it he took all his pleasure. One might catch him on the watch, behind an omnibus or a halted carriage, making sketches of passing scenes. He wore like a bandolier a game-bag in which he kept his pencils and paper, and when he passed down a street, with his long legs and thin body, he never suggested the idea of an artist, but was more likely to be taken for an angler or a naturalist. For studio he had a room over a shop in Chelsea. For furniture two or three chairs, with a table on which one found some wood blocks to receive his drawings. When Whistler became President of the Society of British Artists in Suffolk Street Keene was one of the recruits he brought in to reanimate the old body, and when he failed to obtain re-election as President, and resigned from the society, Keene was one of those who retired with him.

Keene and Whistler, both in temperament and in way of life, differed from one another as much as possible. They saw one another rarely and only chance brought them together, but this did not hinder them from entertaining a great admiration for each other. They were just as different as artists as they were as men. The art of each, extremely personal, kept them apart. But they had the power in common of being able to render London and English life with rare distinction and with astonishing truth. Keene had attended Whistler's *Ten O'Clock* lecture at London in February, 1885, and he was so impressed by it that in the number of *Punch* for 4th July 1885 he placed, as index to volume lxxxix, the figure of Whistler as Mr Punch delivering the *Ten O'Clock*.

Thus we see that Whistler, with his originality, together with the few artists who, like him, were exceptions to the rule, were placed and kept in a subordinate position in England. The dominating spirit was contrary to them, public favour shied away from them. Whistler, as the most powerful of these originators, had, in spite of all, conquered the young artists of influence. Connoisseurs, new writers, all sorts of people knew how to appreciate



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his art, but altogether they never formed more than a small group gathered round himself and suffocated by the whole nation, which it seemed impossible to change. We must return to France, then, and see how he obtained there an approbation of which the effect, as a counterblow, was to make itself felt everywhere else.

Whistler, arriving young in Paris, had shared the life of the French artists. At the period when he found himself in Paris a spirit of change ruled among painters. A new system of æsthetics was being formed. Thence must have come that aversion which he, as all the creative French painters of his generation, had to "historical painting," in which the artist devotes himself to rendering persons and scenes which are not directly presented to his eyes or his imagination, but have first of all taken form in literature. Repudiating all literary attachment, Whistler from his apprenticeship set himself to render life. Courbet had afterwards confirmed him in this path. Courbet had been the first of the older artists to appreciate and praise him, and Whistler had been very grateful to him. Between them was the distance which separates the man arrived at great fame from the young man who is beginning. In his relations with Courbet, which began in 1859 and long endured, Whistler had shown deference and accepted the pre-eminence of the master, which he never did in any other instance. Courbet served him as an example in many ways and wielded a considerable influence over him. The maxim he extolled, "a painter should render only what his eyes can see," was scrupulously observed by Whistler, who, whatever his colour inventions and imaginative titles may have been, never represented any subjects other than those taken from nature around him. Whistler, in truth, was an American en-Frenchised. After having long misunderstood him, *The Times*, nevertheless, knew very well how to define him when in his obituary notice (18th July 1903) it said: "James Abbott MacNeill Whistler was American by birth and French by his artistic education and his sympathies,

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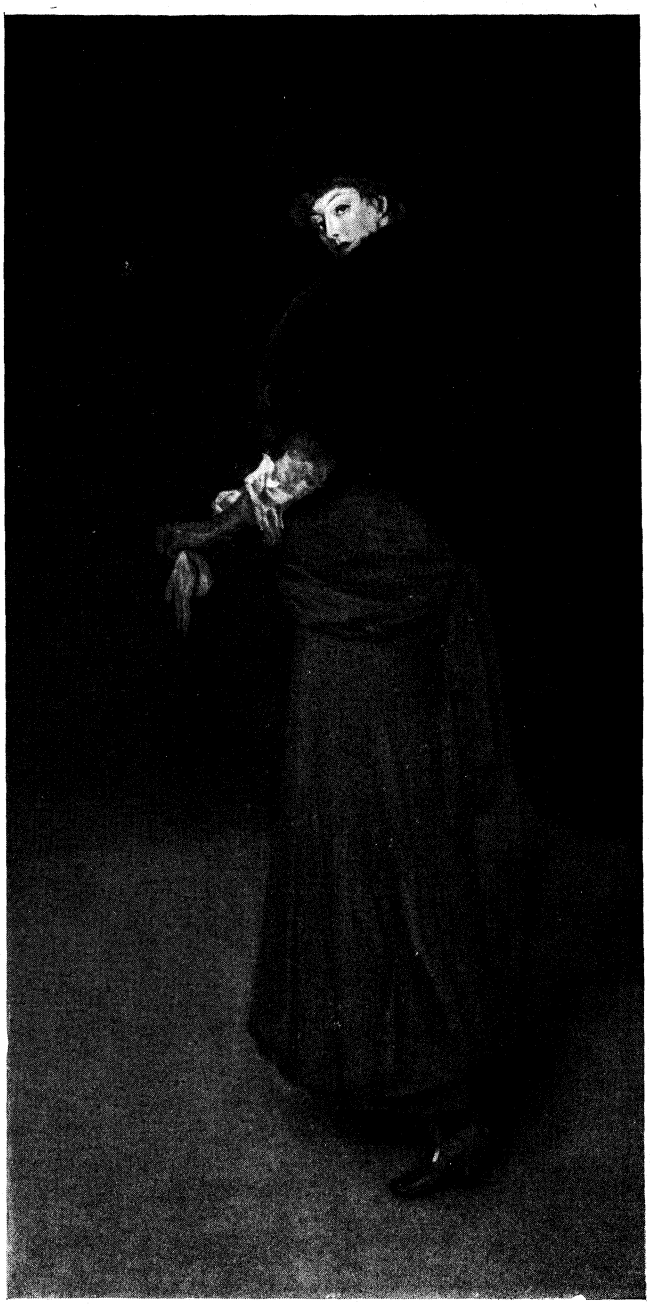

THE YELLOW BUSKIN: PORTRAIT OF LADY ARCHIBALD CAMPBELL

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and French-American he remained to the end, notwithstanding his long residence in London."

During his student days in Paris Whistler had received the deep impress of his French environment and had adapted himself to it so completely that he had from the first been considered by his comrades as one of themselves, without his foreign origin being in any way remarked. Fantin-Latour has well shown his naturalisation in the French art world when, grouping in his *Hommage à Delacroix*, shown at the Salon in 1864, the men who represented in Paris originality and the future, he placed Whistler with Manet, Baudelaire, Bracquemond, Fantin and Duranty.

When Whistler came to establish himself in London he arrived there already formed, at an age when one no longer changes deeply, with a manner of being something very special. Also it appeared that his æsthetic differed from that of the English artists. Moreover, he had no more affinity with the English as a man than as an artist. He was very brown, rather short, slender, with a very mobile countenance, impulsive, capricious; he gesticulated, he spoke loudly, all things opposed to British phlegm. His language was truly that of the country, but the moment he opened his mouth his accent unveiled him and revealed the American. Resembling the English so little, he could not, without foreign aid, arrive at making himself recognised by them for what he was worth, any more than, with his French artist's style, he could clear himself from the reproach of eccentricity and attain that grave demeanour that every man must present in England, whoever he may be, in order to hold rank.

Thus Whistler was in a state of dissent in England. It was only when his person and his pictures returned to France that, placed in a centre where they had affinities, they could find their true place. It was from France, then, that the first just appreciation of his talent came. With his *White Girl*, in the Salon des Refusés of 1863, he had made a great impression and left enduring memories. To the Salons of 1865 and 1867 he sent works which

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confirmed the favourable opinion created by *The White Girl*. In 1865 it was the *Princesse du Pays de la Porcelaine*, of which Burger Thoré said: "As a fantasy of colour this princess is entrancing." In 1867 it was *At the Piano*, which, rejected in 1859, could only have been seen then by a group of artists in Bonvin's studio, but which, now accepted, received the approbation of a more extended circle.

From 1867 to 1882 Whistler let fifteen years pass without sending to the Paris Salon. During this lapse of time the methods of painting had undergone great changes. The effort towards the manifestation of new forms, liberated from classic tradition, had flowered. At the same time a radical transformation had been effected in the constitution of the Salons and the award of prizes. In 1881 the State divested itself of its traditional rights over the Salons and handed them over to the artists themselves, who formed a legally recognised society. The first care of the artists, when masters of themselves, was to change the method of forming the juries. Hitherto juries had been composed partly of members nominated by the Ministry of Fine Arts and partly by those elected by the artists, but only by those who had won prizes, medals, or were out of the competition (*hors concours*). According to the new rules inaugurated by the Société des Artistes Français, all members of the jury were elected by the vote of all the exhibitors without distinction. The first jury so formed found itself composed in the majority of men imbued with the new spirit, who, to mark their rupture with the old blunderings, included Manet among the prizewinners of the 1881 Salon and awarded him a medal.

On his return, at the Salon of 1882 Whistler, therefore, discovered that the old comrades of his student days had become masters, the men who had been rejected with him in 1859 and 1863 were those who had successfully initiated the new ways of painting. Now this new way of painting was painting for its own sake, devoted to the direct rendering of life and nature, forsaking

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mythological, historical and legendary personages, and finding beauty in qualities of line and the palette. This painting was the same as that Whistler had formerly got the idea of in Paris, as that which he lauded without success in England, where, contrary to what had happened in France, literary painting was still dominant. Whistler returned then to find himself in a congenial atmosphere at the Salon of 1882. His pictures could hardly fail to be well received, because they displayed that research after purely pictorial qualities for which the others were also searching.

He made his appearance at the Salon of 1882 with his portrait in black and white of Mrs Meux.[1] This most original work was keenly remarked by the pick of the visitors, but the very uncommonness of its appearance prevented the general public and average critics from recognising its true worth. To the Salon of 1883 he sent a picture he had painted more than ten years before, which had therefore had time to settle down and take its definite character; it was, moreover, one of the most important and successful pictures he ever painted. This was the *Portrait of the Artist's Mother*, and it obtained for him a brilliant success. He had the good fortune to please both the people who knew and the crowd. This old lady, seated in so simple a pose, arrested the common herd by its expression of pathos, while as for the artists and connoisseurs, they loudly praised the harmony and transparence of the greys and blacks, in which was revealed the mastery of a man who obtained the most powerful effects by the most sober means. The jury awarded a medal to the painter.

Now the award of this medal, though only of the third class, was an important advantage for Whistler. In France it was an official acknowledgment of his talent which, appreciated at its first manifestation in 1863 by a minority of artists, was now placed beyond dispute and consecrated. Moreover, this award given in Paris was bound, by noising abroad, to have an influence

[1] By a misprint in the Salon catalogue this was described as *Portrait de M. Harry Men*, a title which has no meaning.

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in England. There at this period Whistler had sunk to the lowest point of disfavour he could possibly reach. The restricted group of his partisans was stifled and powerless, without any striking pleas they could forward against the general disparagement. This medal from the Salon suddenly furnished a convincing argument. From the verdict of the painters of the Royal Academy and the British public they could appeal to the French artists and the Parisian public. Now in the domain of art, especially in painting, Paris has always enjoyed a true pre-eminence, and to be recognised there cannot fail to counterbalance condemnation elsewhere. As a matter of fact, from the moment Whistler received an official award at Paris his position in London began to change. The indignation aroused by him had been so general and deep that the change of opinion came about slowly, and did not become manifest till some years later, after he had received fresh marks of esteem in France. But already, deep down, the tide had begun to turn.

At the Salon of 1884 Whistler exhibited his portraits of Carlyle and of Miss Alexander. His success, which again was exceptional, confirmed that which he had obtained in the preceding year with the portrait of his mother. In point of model and arrangement of colour one could not find two works more unlike than these two portraits. In their contrast each was the complement of the other, and they demonstrated the varied forms that the talent of the painter was able to take. Shown at the Grosvenor Gallery in 1881 the *Portrait of Miss Alexander* had been singled out for abuse by English critics. Caricaturists had so disfigured the young girl represented, that the poor little thing—naturally in capable of understanding the intrinsic merit of the work, and only seeing the ugliness which people read into it—felt quite ashamed when she was pointed out as the original of the portrait and, being recognised, had attention fixed upon her. The artists at the Salon, on the other hand, were quite otherwise impressed by this portrait, with its unlooked-for arrangement of transparent greys and greens.

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PORTRAIT OF THEODORE DURET

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It was the object of numerous laudations and increased the general approbation with which the portrait of Carlyle was received.

Continuing to treat Paris as his exhibition centre, now that he had abandoned the Grosvenor Gallery in London, and that the Society of British Artists in Suffolk Street had shut its doors against him, he sent to the Salon of 1885 his portraits of Lady Archibald Campbell and of Theodore Duret, in 1886 his portrait of Sarasate, and in 1890 two nocturnes. The honorary distinctions conferred by the Government were now added to the recognition awarded him by the artists. He was made a Chevalier of the Legion of Honour in 1889, an Officer in 1891. These decorations clearly showed the esteem in which he was held in France. It was another blow to his detractors in England.

The determining cause of his great success in France was definitely the portrait of his mother shown at the Salon of 1883. Whistler, who had always been keenly sensible to the good reception he had enjoyed in France, who had always known how to show his esteem for all that is French, wished, under the circumstances, that this portrait, the work to which he was most attached, should belong to France. He informed his friends in Paris that he would like to see it hung in the Luxembourg Museum, and since from France had come the honours which had helped to change public opinion elsewhere, he would be grateful if as a last favour it were possible to buy this picture at a price, for that matter, which could be fixed as low as they pleased. The question of money did not concern him in this affair; the low price they might offer was a matter of indifference; it was the principle of the purchase to which he held. In truth, the mere fact that one of his pictures had been purchased by so important a buyer as the French Government for its national museum would wear the aspect of an artistic victory, and would be as good for him, with the Americans and the English, as a regular canonisation.

When the authorities became aware of Whistler's desire that his picture should enter the Luxembourg in the form of a purchase,

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at such a reduced price that his disinterestedness was clearly evident, they showed themselves ready to accept the offer. The picture had been left at Paris in the care of M. Joyant, of the firm of Boussod, Valadon & Cie, who began the negotiation. M. Roger Marx, Inspector of Fine Arts, carried it on at the Ministry, and the purchase at the price of four thousand francs (£160) was decided on in principle. The minister in charge of the Fine Arts, M. Bourgeois, then wrote to Whistler to inform him that he would be happy to acquire the portrait of his mother, but that the sum he was able to offer appeared to him so inadequate that he feared lest it might prove an obstacle to the conclusion of the purchase. Whistler replied in the following letter :—

"*27th November* 1891.

"MONSIEUR LE MINISTRE,—You see me very happy and deeply touched by the honour you do me in proposing the purchase of one of my works for the Musée du Luxembourg. The picture you have chosen is precisely the one I could most earnestly wish to see become the object of so solemn a consecration.

"I hasten then to assure you that the conditions foreseen in your letter will prove no obstacle, since I leave this matter, Monsieur le Ministre, entirely in your care, so that you may fix it yourself according to your knowledge of the resources placed at your disposition, in this matter, by the State.

"This flattering evidence of sympathy, crowning the gracious honours which have already come to me from France, is too precious for me to wish, on this occasion, to regard any other consideration.

"Be so good as to accept, Monsieur le Ministre, the assurance of my highest consideration.

"JAMES WHISTLER."

After this the minister, M. Bourgeois, came in person to see the picture at Boussod Valadon's. He praised it highly and definitely ratified its purchase at the fixed price of four thousand francs,

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while deprecating the inadequacy of this sum. As a result of this transaction, in which courtesy and good will were shown by both parties, the *Portrait of the Artist's Mother* took its place in the Luxembourg.

As Whistler had foreseen, his entry by purchase into the French National Museum was a regular canonisation in the eyes of the English. The London artists of the new generation, now grown up, gave him a banquet to celebrate the event.

The firm of Boussod Valadon, having its principal establishment in Paris and a branch at London,[1] was entirely devoted to him. In 1887 it had published a series of his lithographs, and for some time it had stocked his pictures, which it sold, overcoming as well as possible the disfavour then showered on them. Consequently Whistler resolved to hold in its Bond Street galleries a retrospective exhibition of his paintings. After the workings in his favour that had been going on in England, the marks of approbation officially received in France, the entry of the portrait of his mother into the Musée du Luxembourg, he thought an exhibition of this kind might have a happy influence on the English public. In the manager of the London branch, Mr D. Croal Thomson, he found a devoted auxiliary, who knew how to search out and bring together his pictures. The exhibition opened in March, 1892. It included the portraits of *Carlyle, Miss Alexander, Rosa Corder, Lady Meux in Pink, Lady Archibald Campbell,* then entitled *La Dame au Brodequin Jaune.* Other exhibits were: *The Golden Screen, The Little White Girl, The Symphony in White No. 3, The Balcony, The Fur Jacket.* And the nocturnes: *Grey and Silver, Chelsea Embankment; Blue and Gold, Old Battersea Bridge; Black and Gold, The Fire Wheel; Black and Gold, The Falling Rocket; Grey and Gold, Snow in Chelsea; Grey and Gold, Westminster Bridge; Blue and Silver, Bognor; Blue and Gold, Valparaiso.* And the daylight scenes: *Chelsea in Ice; Crepuscule in Flesh-colour and Green, Valparaiso; Symphony in Grey*

[1] The old "Goupil Gallery" in Bond Street.—*Trans.*

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*and Green, The Ocean*; *Blue and Silver, The Blue Wave*; *Rose and Grey, Chelsea.*

The success of this exhibition revealed the change which the course of years had brought about in English opinion. Thus again we are forced to realise how Time serves the innovators and originators. Once again we may verify the fact that for public opinion to alter itself the action must be slow which brings to life another generation naturally inclined to find good in what had appeared bad to its parents. Behold this same Whistler, then, presenting *en bloc* the works which had been condemned in detail. He would make no concession. There appeared afresh his most disgraced nocturnes. The catalogue abounded more than ever with that musical nomenclature deemed monstrous at its first appearance. His first one-man-show at Pall Mall in 1874 had raised the public against him, but now they had grown accustomed to him, now that the spectators in great part belonged to another generation, the result was altogether different, and a brilliant success was achieved.

True, there were still a certain number of people incapable of understanding the nocturnes and never seeing anything but wayward fancy in the musical titles, but the day scenes and the portraits were accepted and enjoyed by all. And numerous artists, a whole world of young people, admired the whole without exception. Most surprising was the change in the critics and the Press. New writers had arisen, partisans of Whistler to the point of enthusiasm, having nothing but praise to express. The old critics, so pitiless, were no more to be found; some were dead, others softened their censure or remained silent. When the exhibition closed Whistler felt that the situation in England had changed. Henceforward he would be recognised and appreciated. He would be regarded as a creative artist, with the reservation among those who persisted more or less in the old state of mind that at his furthest point his originality reached eccentricity and bordered on the incomprehensible. In addition, he would now

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PORTRAIT OF MRS. E. M. COBDEN

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be able to find buyers for his works and so extricate himself from the financial worry and embarrassment from which he had suffered ever since his ruin at the end of the Ruskin lawsuit.

The portrait of Carlyle figured in the exhibition at Boussod Valadon's with the notice in the catalogue: "Lent by the Corporation of Glasgow." After having been unable to sell it for years, he finally had it bought by the City of Glasgow. But I must relate how it was Whistler came to keep this portrait so long, were it only to teach patience to those artists in the future who, themselves unknown, may also have to wait for buyers.

The portrait of Carlyle had first been shown at London, in 1874 at Pall Mall, in 1877 at the Grosvenor Gallery. The price asked was four hundred guineas, but no purchaser was forthcoming. During the same years he had sent it to an exhibition in Edinburgh. The portrait had attracted the attention of certain patriots, who, desirous of securing for Scotland this likeness of one of her great men, had begun to circulate a subscription list. It was a question of getting together the four hundred guineas demanded. But they took care to explain in a foreword that the motive of their action was solely the desire to possess a portrait of Carlyle and not at all that of having a picture by an artist so decried as Whistler then was. This latter, learning of the uncivil commentary fastened to the purchase of his work, felt his dignity as an artist insulted. He wrote immediately raising the price from four hundred to one thousand guineas. This put an end to all possibility of a sale. In fact the persons who probably would not have succeeded in raising even the four hundred guineas for a portrait which had the disadvantage of being a Whistler stopped immediately before what at this time appeared the unreasonable and insensate demand for a thousand.

Sent back to London, Whistler put the portrait in the care of Mr Graves, a publisher of prints in Pall Mall, who secured the right of reproduction and had it engraved in black and white, as a pendant to the *Portrait of the Artist's Mother*, which he had also

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had engraved. Overwhelmed by money difficulties at the end of the Ruskin case, Whistler obtained from Mr Graves an advance of two hundred guineas on the sale price, always fixed at four hundred guineas. In 1884 he wished to send this portrait to the Paris Salon. I was in London at the time, and, finding himself taken up with the execution of one of his works, he asked me to do him the service of seeing it sent off. I went to see Mr Graves. He agreed with pleasure to the picture being sent to the Salon, which would increase its chances of being sold. Nevertheless, in order to safeguard his advance of two hundred guineas, he would not let it go except against a receipt I gave him, undertaking its return to him after the Salon. The picture was much admired in Paris by artists and connoisseurs, but nobody offered to buy it, and at the close of the Salon I had it sent back to Mr Graves, who returned me my receipt.

Mr Graves, desirous of selling the picture to get back his advance, then asked me to help him to find a purchaser. We passed in review the amateurs and collectors in London whom we suspected of being able even to appreciate a work of Whistler's, and it was impossible to discover a single one in a state of mind favourable to the purchase of the *Carlyle*. I knew a rich business man in Dublin who patronised art exhibitions in Ireland and bought pictures; having just met him in London, I brought him to see the portrait. Mr Graves and I praised it with so much warmth that we almost persuaded him to buy it. Nevertheless he demanded time to reflect. He took the opinion of dealers, amateurs and artists, and the consultations turned his mind completely, so that he renounced the idea of purchase and returned to Dublin without coming to me to say good-bye. I saw him afterwards. Whistler had then conquered public favour and was selling his works. The Irishman expressed the great regret he now felt at having missed the portrait. "But," he said to me, "I was not enough of a connoisseur to override the general hostile opinion, and I thought that you and Mr Graves overpraised the

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work, you out of friendship for Whistler and Mr Graves for business reasons." Mr Graves had not succeeded in selling the picture when Whistler, having re-established his finances, repaid the advance of two hundred guineas and retook possession of his painting.

In 1888 there was held at Glasgow a universal exhibition which joined to industrial exhibits a Fine Arts section. Whistler sent there his *Portrait of Carlyle*, for which he was now asking a thousand guineas. The exhibition had a great success. It was visited by all Scotland, one might say, and by very many English. Carlyle had been dead for years and his portrait attracted particular attention. Glasgow is a rich city which contains collectors of many kinds. There was surely to be found some individual collector or some group willing to pay a big price for a portrait of Carlyle which had been painted by an artist in favour and whose works now usually cost pretty dear. But Scotland did not yet think a picture by Whistler was worth a thousand guineas. So the exhibited portrait, though very much remarked, did not find a purchaser and came back to Whistler in London.

Nevertheless attention remained fixed on this portrait of Carlyle, so often seen, and the Scottish artists who knew how to admire it resolved to take steps to bring about its purchase by the city of Glasgow. They presented a memorial to the City Council petitioning for its purchase. It was necessary, they said, to secure for Scotland this portrait of one of her greatest sons, which had also the exceptional advantage of being a masterpiece of art. Thus enlightened, the Corporation decided, in 1891, to acquire the picture, and sent a deputation of its members to London to secure it. They knew that the price was a thousand guineas. Imbued with old ideas of the small commercial value of Whistler's works, and desirous of economising the public money, the Corporation found the price too high and instructed its envoys to obtain a reduction. Arrived in London, they began to bargain. Whistler, while declaring himself touched by the honour they paid him in seeking out his picture, expressed his astonishment that a city like

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Glasgow should try to haggle over a few guineas, and he declared that if they did not decide here and now to pay him his price he would at once raise it considerably, and would even sell the picture elsewhere. Under this threat the envoys, without more ado, consented to pay the thousand guineas, and the portrait went to take its place in the Glasgow Art Gallery, of which it is now one of the chief glories.

Thus it took nearly twenty years for the *Portrait of Carlyle* to find a purchaser at the price, which seems so modest to-day, of a thousand guineas, and it had been shown without selling at two exhibitions in London, two in Scotland, and at the Paris Salon.

Whistler had been ignored for long by the Americans, his compatriots. He had left the land of his birth, and it naturally took a long time before his name and works were known in a country he no longer inhabited. The first compatriot capable of appreciating him was Mr George Lucas, of Baltimore, a friend of his engineer half-brother. He also had come to live in France, at Paris; he had sought him out on his arrival and become intimate with him. He had the opportunity of giving him a pat on the back by pointing out his works to Mr Avery, of New York, the United States General Commissioner for the Fine Art section of the Universal Exhibition of 1867. Consequently Mr Avery hung a number of Whistler's etchings and four of his paintings, among them *The White Girl*, in the American section of the Universal Exhibition of 1867. Enlightened thenceforward upon the value of Whistler, Mr Avery set himself in particular to seek out his etchings. Thus at a time when they were not very rare he was able to commence a collection which, pursued during many years, and now entered by bequest to the New York Library, has become one of the most precious that will ever be formed.

Excepting the friends of his early days and a few others Whistler remained unknown for years to the Americans, who, for that matter, had no occasion to see his works. When the noise made by his suit against Ruskin, by the strangeness of his

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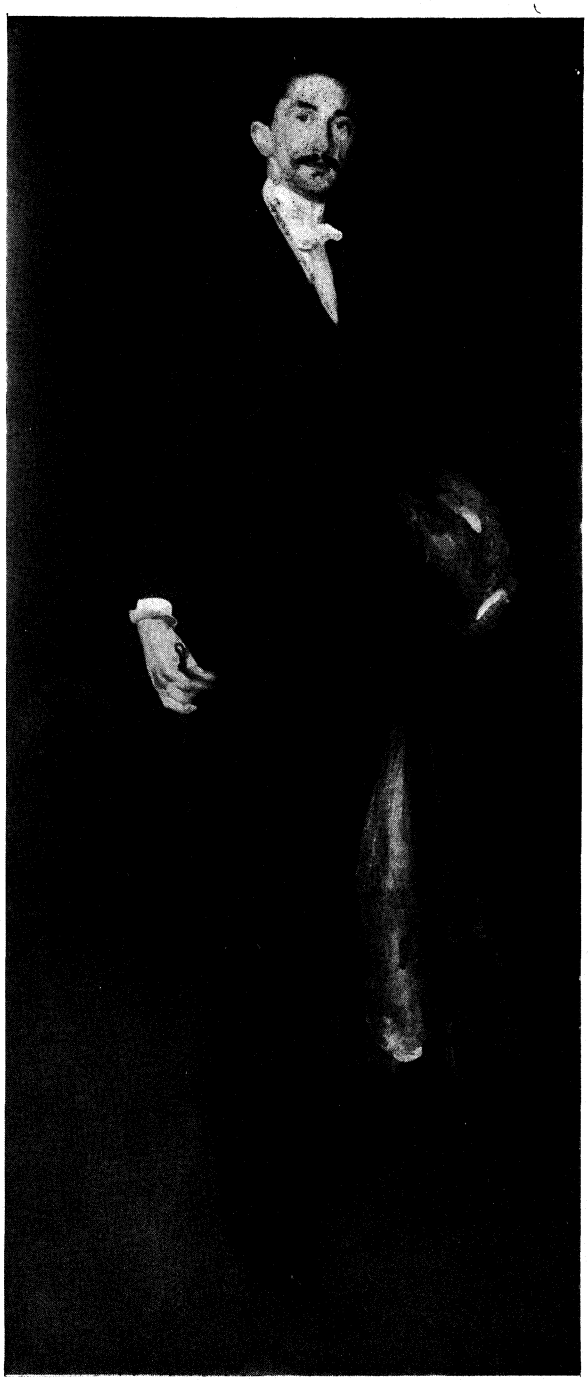

PORTRAIT OF THE COMTE DE MONTESQUIOU

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nocturnes, and by his musical terms, first made his name known among them, they began by seeing his features only as reflected by the English mirror. He appeared to them as an eccentric being, whose art was of uncertain merit and whose talent could not be classified. This opinion prevailed practically till the day when the success he obtained in France made them change their minds. When they saw that Whistler was definitely placed by France in the first row of the illustrious they understood that he must be the greatest artist their country had yet produced. Thenceforward, in various ways, they took care to give him tokens of their esteem and of the pride with which he filled them. From this moment Whistler could feel himself regarded in the United States and ranked as a man who contributed to their national glory.

American collectors set about amassing his works, and with the decision that characterises them, and ever raising the prices, they have transported a very considerable portion of his etchings and pictures from Europe to America.

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## CHAPTER VIII

## THE FINAL YEARS

In his last years, as in his first, Whistler was to show himself an artist in the double part of etcher and painter, with this addition, that the etcher now also played the lithographer. Throughout the years we have just been considering he had continued to add new etchings to the old ones. The last etchings produced by Whistler, whether in series or as single plates, showed the extreme limit his originality was to attain. From the start he was recognisable as the born engraver, a man whose natural propensity was to use the point by preference for drawing. Copper in hand, he had gone at once, under the most different circumstances, to take his scenes from nature. Developing this habit, he arrived at registering the most ephemeral effects; those which others only attempted with pencil and sketch-book he would render with the point and the copper. When he travelled he would take prepared coppers in his luggage, and, arrived at the chosen spot, he would put some plates in his pocket to make use of when the fancy prompted. By this means he accomplished a series of summary studies, rapid sketches. In his company we are far from the classic engraver working in his studio under an unpolished glass.

These last etchings show images seized on the wing, as it were, out of doors. Thus he produced a set of slight marines on the occasion of the great review of the British Fleet at Spithead for the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Victoria in July, 1897. The work was done on a boat. The number of strokes was reduced to a minimum, but the resulting images none the less gave an



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astounding sense of space. They show us ironclads in the distance, diminutive but always powerful. The swell is indicated by a few ripples in the water. Before this Spithead set the epithet which comes of itself as most appropriate is "impressionist." In truth, etching here renders those fugitive appearances and sensations of movement which we were not yet permitted to demand from it.

Taken haphazard, according to the place and circumstance, in France, at Paris, Tours, Bourges, in Belgium, in Holland, in England, the etchings of the last period naturally offer a great variety in the degree of execution and the amount of work; beside quite fugitive motives are found subjects rendered with fullness of detail. Under this last category comes the etchings of Holland. Whistler was very fond of Holland and went there several times. There he made etchings which in technique closely approach to the Venetian plates, and this is explained by a kind of similitude in the subjects, notwithstanding the difference of climate. In Holland, as in Venice, he found monuments and houses on canals, and the methods applied to the first motives were bound to come back with the second, more or less as a consequence of the common bond between them.

In his fastidiousness Whistler had got to be unable to endure his proofs to be drawn by any other printer. The impressions of his last plates have all been drawn by him or under his immediate direction with the greatest care. The subtle work of the point was never allowed to bite the copper deeply, and as a result of printing the lines rapidly weakened. Many of the last etchings are consequently fated to remain very rare.

The etchings were early catalogued. Mr Wedmore, in a catalogue compiled in 1886,[1] gives two hundred and fourteen; in a second edition, published in 1899 [2] the number is raised to

[1] *Whistler's Etchings*, by Frederic Wedmore. London, A. W. Thibaudeau, 1886.

[2] *Ibid.* London, P. and D. Colnaghi, 1899.



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two hundred and eighty-six. In 1902 an American amateur published a catalogue at New York.[1] To the subjects already described he added many new ones, as well as old subjects forgotten, close on a hundred in all, bringing up the total to three hundred and sixty-two. But these, if you please, were only preliminary inventories.

The Americans, having set themselves to take that interest in Whistler which as compatriots they owed him, have now compiled catalogues which one can call final. In 1909, under the auspices of the Carlton Club of Chicago, Mr Howard Manfield edited a catalogue in which four hundred and forty subjects are described, evidently leaving nothing to be discovered but a few rare or obscure states, as may be discovered from time to time in the work of gravers who have produced abundantly, as is discovered even yet in the work of Rembrandt.

Coming after all the others, Mr Edward G. Kennedy has compiled, with the help of the Grolier Club of New York, a veritable monument to the etchings. All the catalogues appearing before that which he produced had been purely descriptive, without reproductions, and a description, whatever it be, is not sufficient to represent adequately an engraving. Really to know it, we must have it under our eyes.

In his catalogue, which runs to four volumes, Mr Kennedy has made few additions to the subjects which Mr Manfield describes, but, entering on a new path, he gives photographic reproductions of all the subjects described, with their different states and variations and, without reduction, in the exact dimensions of the originals. Thus his catalogue contains more than a thousand reproductions.

Here is a priceless work. When one remembers in what small numbers certain engraved work by great masters has been drawn, and in particular certain works by Whistler, and when one takes

[1] *Catalogue of Etchings by J. McN. Whistler*, compiled by An Amateur. New York, Wunderlich, 1902.

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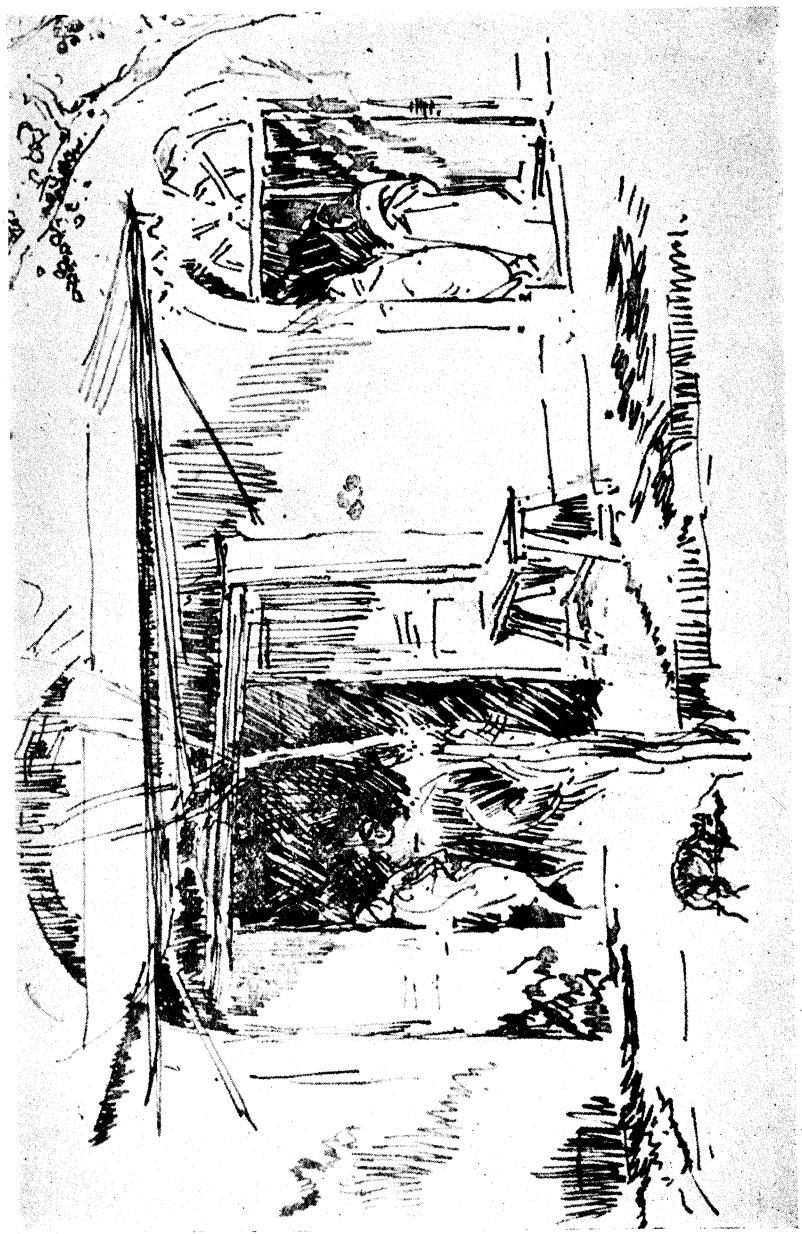

Arab Café, Algiers

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into account the increasing number of collectors and museums, created for the one purpose of swallowing up works of art, one might say that amateurs must henceforward renounce ever seeing with their eyes and touching with their hands the rarest engraved work of great artists. They are fated to remain scattered and imprisoned in countries far apart. But with the catalogue of Mr Kennedy[1] the whole engraved work of Whistler appears; the rarest pieces, the unique states lost or hidden afar off, can all be known.

Whistler showed most of the pictures painted during the last years of his life at various exhibitions, sometimes in Paris, sometimes in London.

When in 1890 the Société Nationale des Beaux Arts was formed in Paris, with its exhibitions at the Champs de Mars, abolishing the system of medals and rewards, contrary to the Société des Artistes Français, which continued the old practice, with their salons in the Champs Élysées, he rallied to the new society and chose it as his exhibition ground for the principal works he wished to make known in France. Thus in 1891 he showed at the Champs de Mars the *Portrait of Miss Rosa Corder* and the marine *Valparaiso*. He sent there in 1892 one of the portraits painted in London after his return from Venice, *Mrs Meux*, now become Lady Meux, the light portrait, *Harmony in Grey and Rose*, with several nocturnes.

In 1894 he had a varied group at the Champs de Mars, nocturnes, two marines, and, dominating all, the full-length, life-size portrait of Comte Robert de Montesquiou-Fezensac. This portrait was painted in Paris, where Whistler, after thirty years, had come back to live. Montesquiou is in evening dress—the third of the kind Whistler painted—his overcoat thrown over his left arm and his right hand resting on a cane. This portrait had as its subtitle *Black and Silver*, after the arrangement of the colour scheme.

[1] *The Etched Work of Whistler*, compiled, arranged and described by Edward G. Kennedy. The Grolier Club of the city of New York, 1910.

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It is one of those works in which we may best see how the artist's concern in obtaining colour harmonies expressed itself without any hurt to his rendering of human features. Thus it also proves that these two qualities, beauty of colour harmony and expression of life, can be parallelly obtained and adapted one to the other without hurt to either. The portrait of Montesquiou is certainly a fine harmony of blacks; nevertheless the original, with his complex character, is well revealed. In this spare and slender being one feels the gentleman and at the same time the man of refined tastes and manners.

In his studio in the Rue Notre-Dame des Champs, where he painted Montesquiou, Whistler also painted a full-length portrait of Mr George Vanderbilt. I saw it late one evening in his studio. I could not see it very well, except the lower limbs, which were very slim. Usually painters arrange parts of the body which seem to them irregular and make them conform to the common type, but Whistler had evidently given their real slimness to the legs of his model. He had, moreover, done it with art, for they seemed in no way disgraceful and well gave the idea that they were sufficient to support the weight of the body. I had only a passing glimpse of this portrait; one peculiarity, that of the legs, struck me, then I forgot about it, having no special reason to remember it.

Years afterwards I found myself at Cologne, returning to Paris by the train arriving from Berlin. In the corridor of the railway carriage I entered a traveller was standing. I was struck by the peculiar slimness of his legs. Regarding him attentively, I could assure myself that I had never seen him; nevertheless his slim legs were known to me. After having long sought to explain to myself how I could recognise a part of a man I had never seen, Whistler's portrait suddenly came into my head. I said to myself this must be Mr Vanderbilt. I made inquiries, and in fact it was he.

I told Whistler how while travelling I had recognised one of his sitters, and he was greatly pleased. It was a proof, as he

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maintained, that his colour research did not hinder him from rendering in all truth the living model.

Whistler also took part in the international exhibitions held in the Petit galleries, Rue de Seze. He showed there on several occasions complete series of pictures. Thanks to his exhibits here, added to those at the Champs de Mars, one could see at Paris the whole gamut of his nocturnes. Productions of the brush conceived ahead of current ideas, with a special appellation, can in no place say very much to the general public. And at bottom the nocturnes were not much more appreciated by the Paris public than they had been in London, only the indignation and contempt they inspired in London had no parallel in Paris. Arrangements of colours and tones, effects of light and shade, long ago accepted as legitimate objects for a painter's research, could no longer appear strange. If Whistler's titles, derived from music, still appeared rather singular, the Parisians, accustomed to the originality of artists, looked upon them as a fancy in no wise impairing the value of the works. Neither for good or evil, then, did the nocturnes acquire in Paris the great notoriety they had achieved in London. The crowd looked upon them as curious things, without getting from them any very definite sensations.

Nevertheless they were understood and admired by those refined minds, the critics, painters, poets and musicians for whom Verlaine has written :

> " For we still desire the tints,
> Not colour, only tints."

In these circles, where the research of unusual form and of subtle expression was the base of æsthetics, they excited enthusiasm. One could not praise them enough. They showed, effectively rendered, those transparent shadows, ephemeral appearances, which seem as if they ought to vanish when one wishes to give them concrete form. That which seemed by its nature to be inexpressible was there, fixed on the canvas. What

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one believed must escape the hand holding the brush was fixed, and nevertheless preserved all its fluidity. In these refined works there was the mastery of execution of him who has succeeded in rendering what others have only dreamed or glimpsed without believing it to be realisable. Gustave Geffroy has expressed the great impression made on him and his friends by these nocturnes when he said : " It is night passing over the water which engulfs the town, absorbs the air, and dominates the landscape, which gives that undefinable colour we see with shut eyes, which makes shadow a visible sign, the prodigious portrait of obscurity." Huysmans also has spoken of it with astonishment : " These scenes of air and water extend to infinity, they suggest dandlings of the fancy, transport us on magic carpets through time immeasurable to extramundane spheres. They are beyond everything, on the extreme boundaries of painting, which in these slight canvases seems to evaporate in ethereal coloured smoke."

Each art has its particular formulas of expression ; nevertheless there are moods which, by their characteristic features, may extend to all. Beneath their technical diversity, then, poetry, painting and music may at certain moments allow a common spirit to be seen. The side of fluidity, of dream, of indeterminate shades that Whistler's painting possessed, had its near equivalent in poetry in the verse of Mallarmé and Verlaine. The pen and the paint-brush, each keeping to its own rules and yet in accordance with an æsthetic fundamentally alike, were here producing and obtaining a result of the same kind after all. Music alone remained outside the refined innovation, but she also was to know it, and the man who gave her the formula, Debussy, was a particular admirer of the art of Whistler. Just as Mallarmé was his poet, so Whistler was his painter. And without wishing to lay undue stress on the painter's influence over the musician, one must believe that Whistler's nocturnes acted, by suggestion, on Debussy and brought him to produce his own. Whistler's nocturnes leave the motive undetermined under a general envelope

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STREET IN ALGIERS

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of atmosphere or shadow, which has its own value and is the excuse for the picture, and equally in Debussy's nocturnes the melody or musical motive remains enveloped in an indefinite and continuous harmony, which forms the very woof of the work.

Thus Whistler, who at the beginning had borrowed from music the convenient words to express the unlooked-for element in his painting, had afterwards shown her by his success that the subtle and indeterminate mood was a desirable form that belonged to her also and might be used.

Whistler took part in the Universal Exhibition of 1900 in the United States section, both as painter and engraver. As painter he sent two recent works, full-length portraits, his own and that of his sister-in-law, Mrs Whibley, known under the title of *The Andalusian*, and an old work, *The Little White Girl*. As an engraver he showed a series of etchings and lithographs. He obtained double honours, two first medals, one awarded to the painter, the other to the engraver.

While he thus participated in numerous exhibitions at Paris, he sent to London to the exhibitions of the International Society of Sculptors, Painters and Gravers, which had its seat at Knightsbridge, and of which he had been elected President. This society, as its name indicates, aimed at bringing English and foreign artists together. During the three years 1898, 1899 and 1901 Whistler had sent to its exhibitions old works already seen and others more recently painted, such as *Blue and Coral, The Little Blue Hat*; *Grey and Silver, The Little Mouse*; *Rose and Brown, The Grasshopper*; *Rose and Gold, Little Lady Sophie of Soho*; *Gold and Orange, The Neighbours*.

In 1888 Whistler had married in London an Englishwoman, daughter of the sculptor Philip, and widow of one of his old friends, the architect Godwin, who had built The White House, where he resided before 1879. In 1892 he came to live with his wife in Paris and inhabited 110 Rue du Bac. His life in Paris was a contrast to that which he had lived in London. Here he

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found himself adapted to his environment, and the eccentricity and propensity for making enemies which England discovered in him no longer appeared. If he was in any way out of the ordinary, and allowed his true originality to be seen, that passed for the artist's way of being, which, by general consent, was admitted to be natural. In Paris Whistler found his merit appreciated; there he met only admirers, and, moreover, he loved the French in a very special way. He had therefore no reason to exercise that combative spirit he had displayed among the English. He lived now in peace, like a wrestler in repose. His society was sought by numerous artists, who visited him Sunday, the day when he received. These relations, pushed in some cases to intimacy, resulted in the production of two of the last portraits of him that were to be made: one, a bust, in dry point by Helleu, executed in 1898; the other life-size, in oils, by Boldini, painted in 1897 and sent to the Universal Exhibition of 1900. Mr A. E. Gallatin, in an iconography, has given a complete list of the portraits and caricatures made of Whistler.[1]

During his stay in Paris Whistler established a school which took his name, placed under the charge of one of his old models, an Italian named Carmen. Whistler lacked the gifts which constitute the real professor, as he is represented by tradition. His teaching always remained without much method and consisted chiefly in recommendations of a general order. In the students' studio he had had his "Propositions—No. 2" on painting placarded, which amounted to saying to them: "If you possess superior faculties, so much the better, go on, develop them; if you are wanting in them, so much the worse, for notwithstanding all your efforts your productions will never have any interest."

Any influence he may have had over the students of his academy, or over the few artists formerly permitted to work with him in London, did not lead to the formation of a school busy

[1] *The Portraits and Caricatures of James McNeill Whistler.* An iconography by A. E. Gallatin. London and New York, John Lane, 1913.

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with repeating or continuing the manner of the master, as at different times has happened elsewhere. In this case the traits of the master were of too personal an order to be able to be communicated. Whistler, then, never really formed pupils. His action direct or indirect on a great number of artists has none the less been great, and his mark is very visible on the art of his time. As for his academy in Paris, it had only an ephemeral existence and was closed without leaving any very distinct traces.

At Paris, then, Whistler led a peaceful life, given to artistic pursuits. All the same his opportunities of conflict on English soil, or with Englishmen, had not altogether disappeared, and two affairs brought him back into the arena. The first arose from an attack directly levelled at him, in a literary form, by an artist, Du Maurier; the second was a lawsuit brought against him by an English baronet about a portrait. In *Harper's Magazine*, New York, Du Maurier, under the title of *Trilby*, published a novel, of which the action took place in Paris. In this he introduced reminiscences of artists, garnered from the days when as a student he had frequented the Paris schools. In the number of *Harper's* for March, 1894, he closely reviewed his old comrades, and among the figures recalled was one, under the name of Joe Sibley, evidently intended for Whistler. Du Maurier illustrated his story with his own drawings, and what removed the slightest doubt as to the real identity of Joe Sibley was that in a drawing of a group of the old comrades he had described with his pen there was one which showed, without any possibility of error, the features of Whistler. Now Whistler, transformed into Joe Sibley, had become "an idle apprentice, the King of Bohemia, a king of beggars," a poser, dressing himself in an eccentric way to attract the attention of passers-by, a conceited fellow who idolised himself, incapable of lasting friendship for anyone whomsoever, a jester, painfully seeking for witty phrases and appropriating those of others, but keeping quiet when he encountered another joker more brutal or stronger in the arm than himself.

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This portrait appeared all the blacker inasmuch as the others, on the contrary, were embellished; Joe Sibley, alone abused, thus appeared as an ugly customer. Further, among his old comrades Du Maurier had found occasion to boast of many arrived, as he said, at glory by their talent and having produced works of the first order, whereas nothing was said of Joe Sibley to indicate that he had become distinguished as a painter and graver.

The way in which Whistler was presented as Joe Sibley left no room for doubting the nature of the author's feelings. For a man so advanced in life as Du Maurier was to trace such a portrait of another man, his contemporary, he must have nursed against him an old rancour.

Nevertheless there had never apparently been any cause of offence or conflict between them. They had known one another in Paris in their student days, and afterwards, established in London, they had formed ties of friendship and maintained cordial relations. But one must have lived with artists to know what bitter sentiments are often hidden under the appearance of friendship. There is always the envy caused by those who, having at first been unknown, eventually raise themselves above others by a real superiority of talent and invention. A real supremacy! Here is something which certain people can never accept or pardon.

Du Maurier and Whistler had met as youths on a footing of equality. Then Du Maurier had lagged behind. While Whistler ascended to the front rank of painters and etchers, he had remained a second-rate draughtsman in the inferior art of illustration. Again, Whistler, in the course of his long fight against the fashionable artists of England, though he had never named Du Maurier, had in a way rated him by implication among those whom he treated as simple manufacturers. Finally Du Maurier, whose entire success came from his *Punch* drawings, had a rival there in Charles Keene. He was the favourite of the public, but the true artists, and Whistler in particular, placed Keene high

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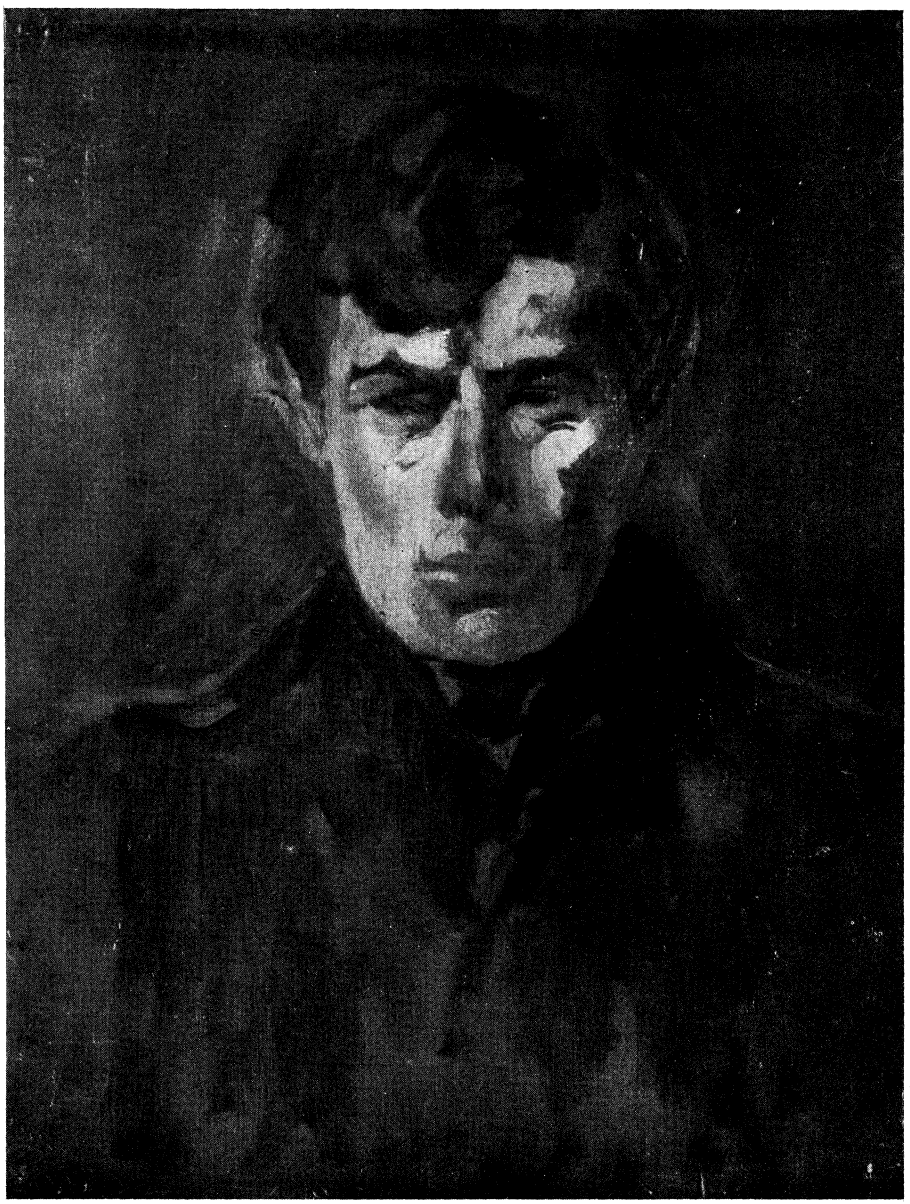

PORTRAIT OF WALTER SICKERT

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above him. The great place Whistler had made for himself as an artist, the contempt he had never ceased to show for the art of which Du Maurier was one of the representatives, the preference accorded to Keene, these had sown rancorous feelings in Du Maurier which the publication of his reminiscences in *Trilby* permitted him to unloose.

Whistler sharply resented the attack of which he was the target. He poured fire and flame into the English Press. Du Maurier only offered ambiguous explanations, without really trying to exonerate himself, which clearly showed the real sentiments by which he had been actuated. If Whistler could obtain no satisfaction from the writer it was otherwise with the publishers. The latter were in an evil plight. They, Americans, in an American magazine, had allowed to be vilified the greatest artist America had ever produced. Among his compatriots Whistler had now obtained the recognition of his talent and had become a man to be treated with respect. The publishers, Messrs Harper Brothers, accorded him, therefore, all the reparation he demanded. They wrote him a letter of apology and made it public. They made it known that the sale of the incriminated number of the magazine had been stopped. They declared, moreover, that if they had had any idea that he had been designated in the published text they would have amended it so as to take out the part concerning him, and that they would suppress it in the volume that was about to appear. In book form the novel of *Trilby* was so expurgated and Joe Sibley is no longer found there.

After this Whistler had to endure an action brought against him by Sir William Eden about a portrait of Lady Eden which he had painted and, after a quarrel had arisen, refused to give up.

Sir William Eden was an English baronet of an old family. In London society his wife was accounted to be a very handsome woman. He was proud of her, and after having had her painted by various artists, he wished to possess her portrait by Whistler. To know the terms for a bust or head of his wife he applied to the

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representative in London of Messrs Boussod Valadon, who told him that the price asked would be four or five hundred guineas. The baronet found this sum excessive, and had recourse to the novelist, George Moore, who negotiated the matter as a friend of both parties. Whistler, under the circumstances, agreed to make a friendly price. The terms were not clearly settled, and thence came the difficulties that were to arise later; but as the affair was conducted between persons who trusted one another, it was only said that Whistler would make a small portrait, the arrangement and dimensions to be left to his judgment, for the price of from a hundred to a hundred and fifty guineas.

Lady Eden began to sit on 9th January 1894, at Whistler's studio in the Rue Notre-Dame des Champs, Paris. Save for a few last touches the portrait was finished when, on 14th February —that is to say, St Valentine's Day—Sir William Eden came to Whistler's studio to express his satisfaction to the artist, and, handing him a sealed envelope, he said: "I bring you your valentine. You will open it when I am gone." One must remember that it is an English custom on St Valentine's Day to send under the cover of letters, cards, remembrances, even costly presents. This is a graceful and kindly act between friends or people who know one another. When Sir William Eden retired Whistler opened his valentine. He found there a cheque for one hundred guineas, in payment of his portrait of Lady Eden. It was a moment of disagreeable surprise. On the intervention of a friend, at a nominal price, he had made a portrait tenderly handled and pushed to a high point of success, such as he could have sold as a picture for a much better price than the hundred and fifty guineas agreed upon. And all of a sudden the person for whom it was intended took it upon himself to settle the final price, fixed it arbitrarily at the minimum sum that had been in question, and, while accomplishing this certainly mean act, nevertheless pretended to act graciously by presenting the sum in the form of a valentine.

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Whistler wrote the baronet an ironical letter acknowledging the receipt of his valentine. He declared: "You really are magnificent!—and have scored all round." Eden returned to ask Whistler to explain himself, declaring that he was shocked at the tone of his letter. He offered to add to the hundred guineas already sent the fifty guineas of the maximum price spoken of. But Whistler would not accept or give any explanation. He received his visitor at the door of his studio, without even allowing him to enter, and limited himself to repeating, "You really are magnificent," and when they separated they were offended in a way never to see one another again.

Whistler, taken unawares by receiving the hundred guineas in the form of a valentine, and by the unexpected behaviour of a man he had considered as a friend, could not decide immediately what to do; above all, he could not foresee an action before the Law Courts. He paid the cheque into his bank and sent the portrait of Lady Eden to the Champs de Mars exhibition of 1894, where it was described as *Portrait of Lady E.; Brown and Gold.* We shall see when the lawsuit was started how these two actions told against him.

Far from Whistler forgetting the unexpected sending of the valentine, his resentment only grew. He decidedly believed that the baronet, from the moment he asked a friend to intervene to secure him the portrait, had no other thought but to obtain it at the lowest possible price, below its value, and that all his professions of gratitude and admiration had only tended to this interested end. He resolved, therefore, to return the hundred guineas he had received and to keep the portrait, effacing the head of Lady Eden, but preserving the body and colour arrangement for use with another sitter. This was the decision his representative communicated to Sir William Eden after the reiterated demands of the last for the delivery of the portrait. Foiled in this attempt, Eden started an action to get possession of the disputed object. It was heard on the 27th of February 1895 in the

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Sixth Chamber of the Civil Tribunal, under the presidency of M. Toutée.

The counsel for either side explained at length the circumstances of the case, and naturally contradicted one another in general and in particulars. Under these circumstances the judges did not appear to be anxious to have made clear to them the motives by which the opponents had been actuated. They only saw in the business a contract between the producer of a certain object and the buyer. And relying on the fact that Whistler had received and paid into his bank the cheque for a hundred guineas —which amounted in their eyes to his definite acceptance of the price—they declared that the portrait, from this moment, had ceased to belong to the artist selling and had become the property of the baronet buyer, that the painter had no longer any right to touch it again, to repaint it or to efface the features of Lady Eden, especially after having himself tacitly admitted that it was finished by sending it to the exhibition at the Champs de Mars. The tribunal condemned Whistler, then, first of all to return to Sir William Eden the hundred guineas received, next to deliver to him the portrait in the state it was in, with the head effaced, and finally in addition to pay a thousand francs (£40) damages and costs for Lady Eden's expenses in coming uselessly to stay in Paris.

Whistler appealed against the judgment. His advocate, Maître Beurdeley, defined the debate before the Court. He accepted that part of the judgment which compelled Whistler to return the hundred guineas, since his client had already taken the initiative of putting these at the baronet's disposition; he also recognised that an indemnity might be due to Lady Eden for having been brought to Paris uselessly to sit, but after this he set himself to establish the right of his client, as an artist, to decide whether or no he should deliver the portrait, and consequently the rightness of his conduct in having refused, under the given circumstances, to deliver it up. Me. Beurdeley contended that a

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PORTRAIT OF MISS WOAKES

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work of art, such as a portrait by a great artist, could not be treated like a mere manufactured product. By the nature of things, the quality of beauty, the merit of a structure, the perfection of form which ought to be united in a work, from a purely technical standpoint, for it to constitute a work of art, are of an exceptional kind and of uncertain success. In consequence the artist ought to be allowed to remain the judge, up to the last moment, of the question of knowing whether he has obtained them and whether the work produced satisfies him sufficiently to permit its delivery. Any work wrought by an artist, therefore, could not give rise to a firm contract. Between an artist and a collector there could be an engagement of no other order than an obligation to execute which, where the artist failed to fulfil, ought to resolve itself into a question of damages and interests. Me. Beurdeley asked then that the part of the judgment condemning Whistler to deliver the portrait should be set aside.

The Court, presided over by the first president, Perivier, ordered, as the tribunal had done, and as Whistler had always consented to do, that the hundred guineas should be returned to Sir William Eden, and that in addition he should receive a thousand francs damages and costs for Lady Eden's useless expenses and loss of time. Then, agreeing with the arguments of Me. Beurdeley, and adopting his conclusions, the Court set aside the judgment of the tribunal on the point of the delivery of the picture. It decided that Whistler should remain the possessor of it, only changing its character and effacing the features of Lady Eden.

This decree of the Court, reversing the decision of the first judges, gave great satisfaction to Whistler. He kept the picture he had refused to deliver, and he had established the precedent that between an artist and a collector there can be no ordinary sale contract, in the case of a commissioned work, but only an engagement of a particular order, an obligation to execute, leaving the artist free up to the last minute to retain or deliver the work.

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Whistler, who had already published a pamphlet at the end of his Ruskin lawsuit, issued a new one after this second lawsuit with the title, *The Baronet and the Butterfly.*

Therein he showed how the decision of the Court, in establishing the long rights of an artist over his works, safeguarded its dignity and recognised the noble character of art.

The Eden case was the last episode of the long war Whistler had to wage before seeing his art fully accepted. In it he had shown himself endowed with that excitable mind which does nothing to avoid encounters and even ends by accustoming itself to and taking pleasure in them. It is not astounding that a man so constituted, while wrestling with his adversaries, should have had to endure all sorts of insults and accusations. In these circumstances, if one wished to limn his character after contemporary writings, one could make a portrait of him little flattering and find out all his faults. But one ought to deal with him as one treats every fighting man, any politician, for example, exposed to much abuse in his contests. Now in gauging the character of a politician we disdain the current criticism levelled against him, to judge him in the end by some great act in his career and the outstanding features of his conduct.

Applying these principles to Whistler, one recognises that his long fight, with detailed actions so multifarious, was entered upon with the most legitimate purpose, the defence of his art, then to make a place for it, to make it accepted, to make it triumph. And when we consider the nature of the accusations and attacks he had to endure we are no longer surprised at the sharpness he brought into the struggle, the invectives and counter-accusations he hurled at the head of his opponents. For the verdict against which he had to defend himself was not merely whether he had more or less talent; it went so far as to deny his honesty. Hoaxer! Charlatan! producing nothing but imperfect works and sketches. For long this was the current opinion about him in England. The animosity aroused against him was so great

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that the attack against him was taken into the territory of commerce; it was declared publicly that his works had no mercenary value, and this brought about his ruin, so that he was compelled to pass those years of his life, which might have been his happiest, in anxiety and pecuniary difficulties.

Now that after the lapse of time we look upon his painted work, we ask why people could not immediately recognise it for what it was, the natural production of a man original by nature. For unexpected features, the character *sui generis*, when they appear, are in themselves the unexceptionable signs of true originality. A real dissimilarity with others cannot have in it anything artificial. The exceptional turn is given by nature, and no effort can procure it for him who has not brought it with him from the start. Hoaxers and impostors cannot live here. How many twist and turn themselves to produce works which may pass for original and only arrive at piling the ridiculous on the platitudinous! How many would consent to be treated as hoaxers and impostors on condition that one could distinguish their work above the flood, and, hard as they may try, never succeed!

True originality shows itself as an offence. Suddenly, in a society with a certain way of living, there arises something different, something dissimilar. Endowed with a particular temperament, with a special vision, Whistler produced his harmonies, his symphonies, his nocturnes, in the first place to satisfy himself; afterwards, when he showed them, people had under their eyes works of absolute sincerity, of perfect good faith. All that the writers, beginning with Ruskin, all that the critics, the cultured public and the crowd pretended to find in him in the way of charlatanism and imposture was only a fresh manifestation of the difficulty men experience in recognising true originality, in no matter what sphere, but above all in that of painting. Schopenhauer has classed artists and men of intellect according to the difficulty they have in making themselves appreciated. He has placed as those most easily understood and judged on their merits,



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the dancers, the actors, in an intermediary position the poets, at the end of all the philosophers, and immediately before them the painters.

This classification ought to be held as exact, at least so far as painters are concerned, and the case of Whistler, if necessary, might be used as a fresh example to support his argument.

After the death of his wife in 1896 Whistler continued for some time to live in Paris. Then old and tired he returned to live in London, where his mother-in-law, Mrs Birnie Philip, and his sisters-in-law, Mrs Whibley and Miss Birnie Philip, could take care of him and constitute themselves his family. He took a house in Cheyne Walk, Chelsea, the spot where he had formerly resided, contemporaneously with Carlyle and Rossetti. Cheyne Walk had greatly changed since that old time. Its picturesque and retired aspect no longer existed. Old Battersea Bridge, so curious with its wooden supports, had been replaced by an iron bridge. An embankment with a wide roadway had eaten away the stretch of turf which formerly had extended almost to the Thames. Tall houses had partly taken the place of the small old-fashioned ones. Only the church with its clock tower remained as a landmark of the olden time. In returning to Cheyne Walk Whistler could not have had the idea of adding new works to those which the old aspects had suggested to him. The choice of locality, as of residence, had been chiefly dictated by the existence at No. 74 of a house with a studio big enough to permit him to work there at his ease.

At the end of 1900, suffering from a prolonged cold, to escape the London fogs and find sunshine, he journeyed to Tangiers, Algiers, Marseilles, and from Marseilles he went to finish the winter at Ajaccio. He came back to London in May, 1901, bringing several water-colours and sketches, mostly of Algeria, made in the course of his travels.

In the month of July, 1902, he wished to revisit Holland. He set off in the company of a friend, a compatriot, Mr Charles Freer,

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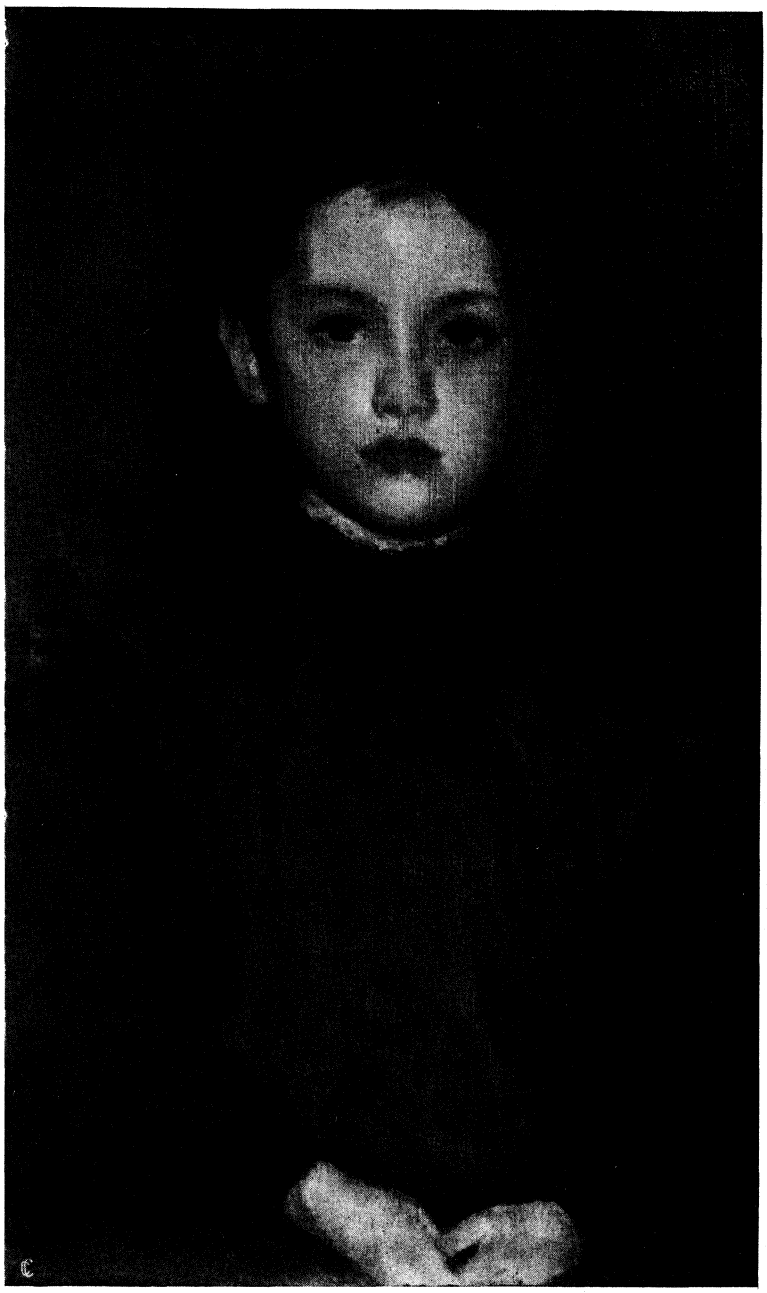

THE LITTLE ROSE OF LYME REGIS

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who had already begun to make a very important collection of his works. On arriving at Flushing he was seized with a weakening of the action of the heart, which at once put his life in danger. Mr Freer was able to take him to The Hague, whither doctors and his sisters-in-law hastened to lavish care on him. For some time he remained extremely weak, then his improved condition allowed him to return to London. He had regained enough strength to be able to start working in the winter. Thus he was able to continue some portraits he had in hand and to paint some new works, heads and busts of young girls.

But the heart weakness, a result of fatigue and the wear and tear of age, became chronic. In fact a relapse in June, 1903, prostrated him, as the first attack had done in Holland, and with this aggravation, that he now had less strength to resist it. Nevertheless he got relatively better about the 15th of July and his friends could believe that his death had again been deferred. On Friday, 17th July, he felt pretty well; he had talked good-humouredly during lunch, when suddenly, about three o'clock in the afternoon, he was seized with syncope and lost consciousness. He died without suffering. The heart had suddenly ceased to beat.

The funeral service, according to Anglican rites, was conducted in Old Chelsea Church, that it had so often pleased him to represent, and he was buried in Chiswick Cemetery, beside his wife, and not far from the tomb where Hogarth rests.

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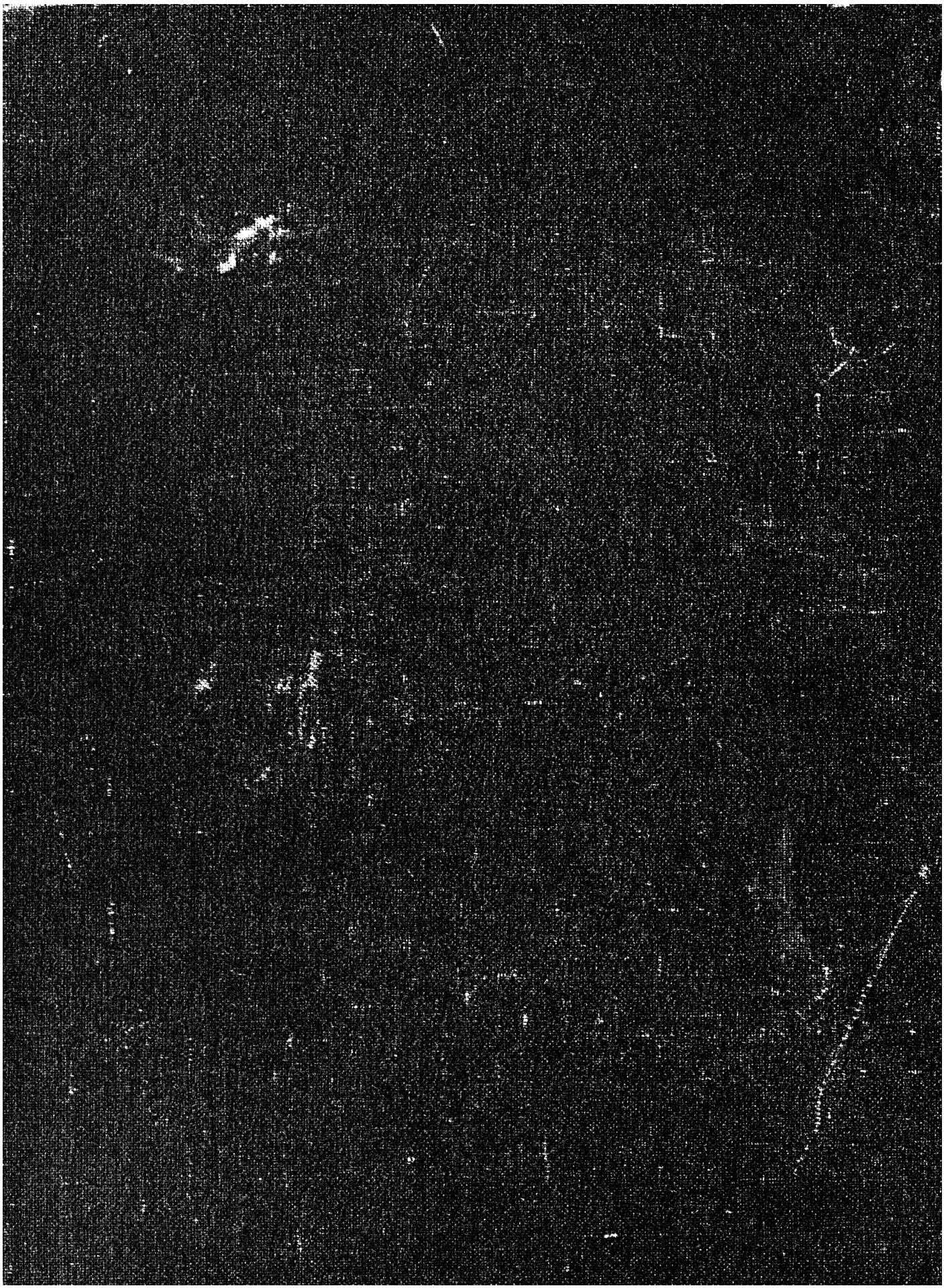
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